



**ADACAS**  
Advocacy

# Annual Report: A Year of Impact

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**2024**









# A Year of Impact: 2024

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## Acknowledgement of Country

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

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

Always was, always will be Aboriginal land. Sovereignty was never ceded.



*The work presented to the Team in August 2024 represents the values and purpose of ADACAS.*

## Acknowledgement of 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 people's bodies, genders, sexualities and relationships.

We recognise the needs and contributions of people from culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse backgrounds for 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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## Our commitment

ADACAS is committed to having a workforce that represents our local community and provides a safe and ethical work environment that supports and embraces diversity. We know this will provide the best outcomes for our clients. This includes our commitment to the Carers Act.



# Message from the Chair

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This year has been a pivotal and successful period for ADACAS.

We developed a new three-year Strategic Plan. Our strategic objectives focus on increasing access to advocacy and promoting self-advocacy and Supported Decision Making. Major new areas of focus are to better understand and measure the outcomes we achieve for our clients, and the impact we have on Government policy and practices and community inclusion through systemic advocacy.

Building our data capture and analysis capability is part of the journey we are on, and I'm pleased that we can now report on trends in individual advocacy and major presenting issues. We are also increasing the data we have on client experience.

It is clear from the significant increase in hours of advocacy that clients are dealing with complex and challenging issues. The range of policy and legislative reviews, and royal commission driven reforms is complex to navigate for people and it continues to be a challenge to promote and uphold fundamental human rights for people. The persistent issues faced by our clients include access to appropriate and affordable accommodation, maintaining their rights in the justice system, accessing health and other services, and understanding finances and preventing abuse.

The Board's focus has also been on future sustainability and strengthened governance. ADACAS has successfully expanded and

diversified our funding sources, and has diligently managed our finances. We are also maturing our performance reporting and risk management frameworks and actively overseeing our culture and wellbeing and cyber-resilience.

Our foundations remain strong, thanks to the tireless efforts of our dedicated staff, who continue to work with enthusiasm and commitment. Our CEO, Wendy Prowse, deserves special recognition for her leadership in driving positive change. Our volunteer Board members have been instrumental in shaping our forward strategy.

We extend our sincere thanks to our outgoing Board member Greg Mahoney for his invaluable contributions. We welcomed Vaughn Melano and Chris Collett to the Board in December 2023.

Finally, we are deeply grateful for the ongoing support of our funding partners—the Commonwealth, ACT, and NSW Governments—and the leadership provided by OPAN and DANA our peak bodies for advocacy. Together, we continue our journey toward a more just and inclusive community.

We look forward to another year of growth and impact as we work alongside our clients, partners, and stakeholders.

Helen McDevitt PSM, GAICD  
Board Chair





# Message from the CEO

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Reflecting on the past year, I am filled with pride and gratitude for all we've accomplished at ADACAS. Our purpose has always been to support and amplify the voices of those who need it most—people living with disability, those experiencing mental ill-health, older people, and their carers—and this year, we've done just that.

We recognise that the demand for advocacy has never been greater. Over the last year, we have seen an 11% increase in advocacy cases and a 40% increase in advocacy hours. This highlights the important work that Advocates undertake to support people living with disability, experiencing mental ill-health, and older people in navigating complex systems, ensuring their voices are heard, and their issues are resolved where possible and providing them with the outcome they are looking to achieve.

The Team has supported over 1600 people with over 2600 cases of advocacy. At times, clients were waiting for over 8 weeks to go through our Intake process. I am pleased to say that we have reviewed our approach and are now able to engage with clients within 25 days. This said, we continue to triage and provide advocacy when the matter is time-critical or critical.

We also recognised that we needed to do more to reach the most

vulnerable members of our community and so we have focused our energy to have regular outreach sessions, often in closed environments such as mental health facilities and custodial settings, ensuring that this very vulnerable cohort are aware of our services. This has also led to an increase in referrals.

ADACAS continues to be innovative, working with clients in a way that suits them. At times we have had over 120 people living with disability or experiencing mental ill-health waiting for an advocate and so in the coming year we will be exploring other ways of engaging with clients to try and keep our waitlists at a reasonable level.

Due to the complexity of clients' needs and Government reforms and changes across the system, we have seen a significant increase in the hours needed to support clients. We look forward to continuing to work with Government agencies to reduce bureaucracy and increase efficiency that will benefit all involved. We also welcome the opportunity to participate in forums to raise the systemic issues that we see are impacting the ability for people living with disability, experiencing mental ill-health and older people to live a decent life.

All of the great work achieved at ADACAS would not be possible without the dedication and expertise of our 35 passionate staff.

Our **ADACAS Strategic Plan (2024–2027)** lays out our roadmap for the future, and I’m excited to see how we can continue to grow. Some of our key goals for the coming years include:



### Reaching more people:

We’re expanding our outreach, making sure that those who need us most—whether they’re in public hospitals, mental health facilities, or underserved communities—know about the support we offer.



### Empowering through Supported Decision Making:

We want to help people take control of their lives by giving them the tools and confidence to make informed decisions and reduce the incidence of substitute decision making.



### Driving systemic change:

By sharing the stories and data from our advocacy work, we’re pushing for changes in laws, policies, and community attitudes that will improve the lives of our clients.



### Raising awareness and building inclusion:

We’ll continue to engage with businesses and the community, offering education and training to support mainstream businesses. We also offer education on the Aged Care Charter of Rights, and building awareness of abuse prevention.

Looking ahead, one of our biggest focuses will be measuring and showing the impact of our work. We know the difference our advocacy makes in people’s lives, and we’re committed to sharing those stories and results with our supporters, partners, and the broader community. As part of our strategic plan, we’re developing an Outcomes Framework to better track the changes we’re helping create and ensure we keep improving.

At ADACAS, we are also deeply committed to creating a culturally safe and inclusive environment for everyone. We’re on a journey of reconciliation and constantly working to ensure that our services are accessible to all, no matter their background.

As we move forward, I’m excited about the opportunities ahead. I want to thank our clients, the ADACAS Board, and in particular our Chair Helen McDevitt, the ADACAS Team, and our partners for their support. Together, we’ll keep making a real difference in the lives of people who need it most.

Warmly,  
Wendy Prowse  
Chief Executive Officer, ADACAS





# Overview

# Welcome

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At ADACAS, we believe everyone deserves the chance to be heard, valued, and supported. Since 1991, we've been standing beside people living with disability, those experiencing mental ill-health, older people, and their carers, providing free and independent advocacy services.

We serve communities in the ACT and across the Capital Region, Murrumbidgee, Illawarra and Shoalhaven areas of NSW, helping individuals understand and exercise their rights.

Our vision is simple: a community where every person can live a life of dignity, make choices that matter to them and pursue their dreams. At the heart of ADACAS is our goal to uplift, protect, and promote the rights of those who need support.





## What we aim to do:



We're committed to evolving with the needs of our clients and delivering advocacy that truly makes a difference.



We believe in fairness and are passionate about advancing human rights and social justice for all.



We focus on creating a welcoming, inclusive community where diversity is celebrated.

## How we make it happen:



We ensure the voices of vulnerable individuals are heard and respected.



We empower people to make decisions about their lives, helping them navigate challenges with confidence.



Through our advocacy, we push for changes in the community that foster well-being, fairness, and inclusion.

## Our guiding principles:

### Social Justice

We advocate for the realisation of a person's human rights, equitable access and fair and just outcomes via individual and systemic advocacy.

### Integrity

We are transparent, authentic and ethical in our work and guided by human rights principles.

### Pursue Excellence

We are continuously learning and working collaboratively and innovatively to effect positive change and meaningful outcomes.

### Reflective Practice

We consciously work to build trust, increase self-awareness and improve our practices through respectful and constructive dialogue.

ADACAS is a proud member of the Disability Advocacy Network of Australia (DANA) and the Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN). These partnerships allow us to advocate for systemic change on a national level, ensuring the voices of our clients are heard where it matters most.

With a passionate team of around 35 staff, we advocate for individuals' rights and building a more just and inclusive society.

# Aligning our impact with our strategy

## Individual advocacy and support: to meet the needs of our clients



We helped more individuals access our advocacy services, focusing on those often marginalised and needing extra support.



We provided education and resources to help clients advocate for themselves, building their confidence and independence.



Our work influenced broader changes in the system by using data and client stories to shape policies and change societal views.

## Community attitudes and systemic change



Through projects and programs, we raised awareness about human rights, preventing abuse, and the importance of community inclusion, which led to positive shifts in attitudes.



We reached out to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, CALD communities, and LGBTIQ+ populations to ensure they received the advocacy they needed.



Our collaborative work resulted in important changes to laws and policies that support our advocacy efforts.

## Expanding access to advocacy



We broadened our services and supported more clients, particularly those from priority groups.



We tracked our growth, extended our advocacy reach, and monitored the success of our outreach efforts.



We helped clients take control of their lives by promoting self-determination and self-advocacy, ensuring they could make informed decisions.



## Our Clients





Over the last year, we have provided a significant increase in advocacy hours due to increased complexity in the systems that our clients engage with. We have seen:



struggles in dealing with the NDIS



ongoing challenges to access appropriate and affordable housing for people with disability



complex reforms in the Aged Care sector



a sense of desperation and hopelessness amongst clients with disability and mental ill-health.

Access to individual advocacy has never been more important.



Through our data collection, we are able to identify systemic issues and raise these matters as we participate in a wide range of Government consultations and meetings with Government officials. ADACAS also shares insights as to the issues our clients face with OPAN and DANA, the peak bodies representing advocacy for Older People and People with Disability.



# Our clients' satisfaction

Measuring client satisfaction is vital to ensuring we are doing the best job we can.



It was pleasing to see that over 80% of clients who participated in our Client Engagement Survey felt supported, understood, and satisfied with the advocacy support they received from us.

We were also pleased that 81% of clients who were surveyed stated that they would refer someone to ADACAS.

For some clients, it was challenging when they weren't able to get the outcome that they wanted, which was generally due to the systems in which we work.

We shared their concerns about the delay in accessing advocacy support, which was due to our limited resources. We appreciated their comments about more funding needed to support people across multiple complex issues.



Our advocacy work ensures our client voices are heard. We help clients understand and navigate complex systems to make informed decisions.

Our Strategic Plan focuses on increasing the number of people accessing advocacy, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities and those from LGBTIQ+ communities. We are pleased to have increased our engagement with:



CALD communities over the year by 14%.



LGBTIQ+ communities by 15%.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by 31%.



# Our Individual Advocacy

# What we provide

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**Individual advocacy is when we work with a client on a problem they need help to resolve. We help represent their views and interests and share the options available. With a client's consent, we will involve family and other support people.**

We provide a free and confidential service and support to individuals providing issue-based advocacy.

We work across a wide range of individual advocacy issues for people with disability, including NDIS, and support people through appeal processes; work with people to navigate complex issues dealing with mental ill-health and disability services; and ensure the rights of parents living with disability are upheld when dealing with child protection. Our Advocates work with people accessing mental health services, seeking assistance with housing, engaged in the justice system, as well as those dealing with matters relating to health, education, employment, discrimination and complaints.

Our approach to advocacy is place-based, and we work with clients in a manner that best suits them. While the majority of Advocates are located in Canberra, we have staff working across NSW so that we can ensure that clients living with disability and mental ill-health are able to receive the place-based individual support they need.

## Older Persons Work

The Older Persons Team provides issue based individual advocacy as well as information and advice, supporting people to self-advocate or be assisted through the model of supported decision making. The team regularly provide education sessions on the Aged Care Charter of Rights to residents living in Residential Aged Care Facilities and those living in the community. External engagement is also a key focus with regular sessions across many of the shopping centres across Canberra and outreach sessions across the community. We have seen an increase in the need for people accessing the service of the financial advocate to support clients around the invoices they are receiving from aged care providers.

## Redress Scheme

ADACAS supports people seeking access to the Redress Scheme in the ACT and across Southern NSW. Advocates use trauma informed practice to support people to tell their story and seek the support they need through the partnership approach and to access counselling services funded by the scheme. ADACAS continues to conduct outreach sessions informing people across the community of this service and working with them over, often, a lengthy period of time to collect the information needed to be eligible.





These figures underscore the increasing demand for our services and the importance of our role in supporting individuals with complex needs as they navigate systems, resolve their issues, and exercise their rights.

Due to the complexity of clients' needs and the impact of reforms and changes across systems, we supported 200 fewer clients across this financial year. This said, our Advocates supported people with an overall increase of 11% more cases across this financial year. We demonstrated the complexity of clients' needs or issues supported across multiple advocacy cases.

### Mental Ill-Health

The time spent advocating for people experiencing mental ill-health has increased dramatically. **Year on year, we have seen an increase of 72%.** However, the greatest increase has been post-COVID, with an increase of 135% from 2022 to 2024.

### Disability

There was a 12% increase in cases in the ACT and 51% increase in cases in NSW.

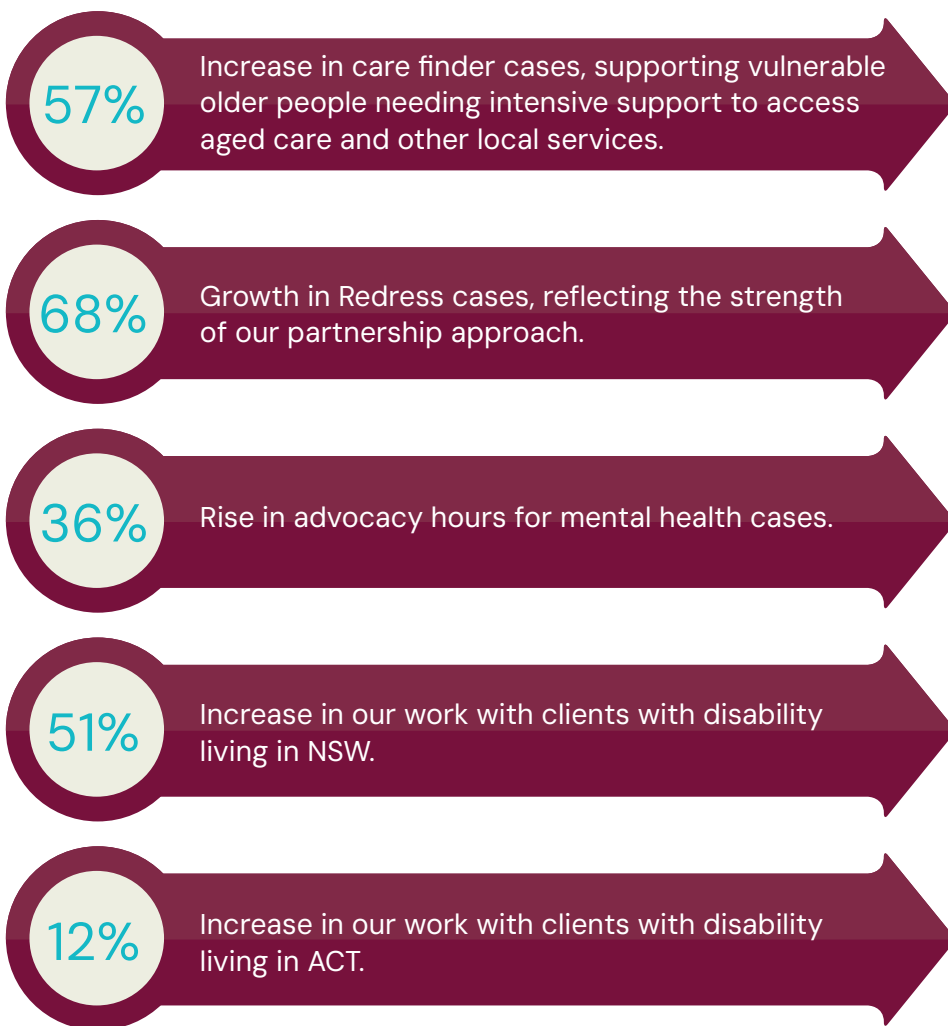
### Older Persons

There was a 3% increase in cases to support older people in Aged Care Facilities and those accessing Home Support Services. There was 57.5% increase in cases to support people to access My Aged Care and continue their engagement with services.

This highlights the important work that Advocates undertake to support people with disability, mental ill-health and older people to navigate complex systems, ensure their voices are heard, and, where possible, their issues are resolved, providing them with the outcome they are looking to achieve.



Some of the key highlights of the 2023/2024 period include:



## The outcomes and impact of our work



From the advocacy services provided, we have seen parents with disability not lose custody of their children and also receive greater access to their children who have been removed.



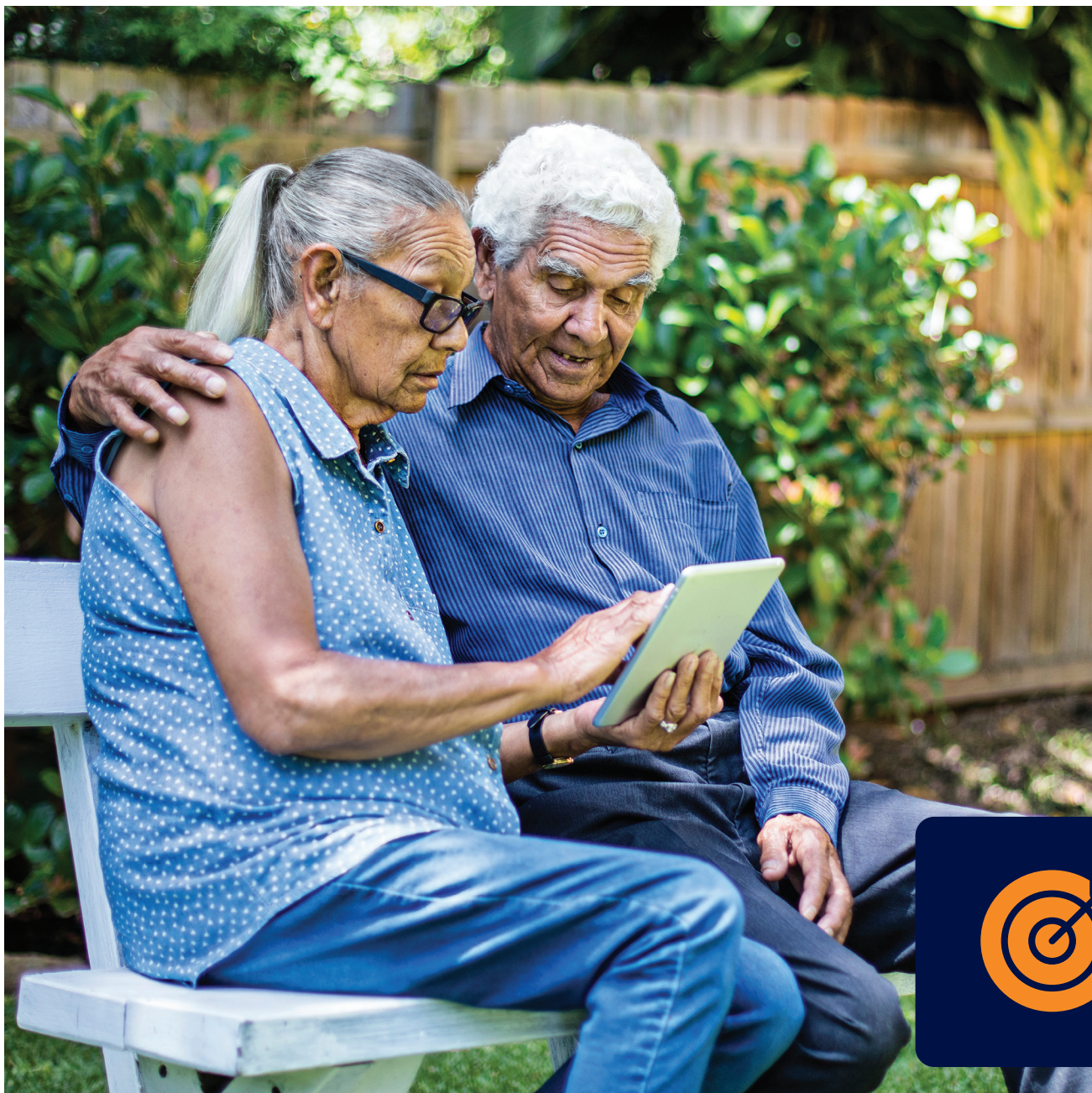
Advocates have successfully ensured that clients get the services and support they need through their NDIS plans and have a positive outcome through an appeal process.



Clients' capacity is increased as they are supported to navigate complex systems, such as housing applications and the disability support pension.



Clients' human rights are upheld, and their voices are heard when dealing with medical professionals, lawyers, and those in custodial settings. Information is provided to clients in a way that suits them so they can make informed decisions.



# The impact we can have

## What is the impact of our individual advocacy?

Our dedicated Team of Advocates worked for more than 17,000 hours, providing individual advocacy to their clients. But what is the potential economic impact of that hard work?

Using data from a Cost-Benefit Analysis of Australian independent disability advocacy agencies, we estimate that our 17,000 hours potentially translate to millions of dollars in economic benefit for the communities where we work through improved outcomes in employment, education, and reduced reliance on costly crisis services.



We estimate that our 17,000 hours of individual advocacy potentially translates to millions of dollars in economic benefits.



# Advocacy services we provide for older people

## Older person individual advocacy

Our Older Person Team provide information and advocacy support to older people in the ACT aged over 65 and 50 years or over for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. We focus on ensuring that aged care rights are upheld and that individuals' wishes are met, whether they are living independently at home or in residential care.

In partnership with the Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) through funding under the National Aged Care Advocacy Program (NACAP)– the Team delivers essential education and information sessions to aged care recipients, their families, representatives and aged care staff, focusing on Aged Care Rights and raising awareness on the abuse of older people. We also run events across the ACT to raise awareness and encourage people to access the advocacy they need.

The Advocates support people who use aged care services and have concerns relating to the quality of services, access to services, communication issues, concerns about invoices and costs associated with aged care services, concerns around abuse or neglect and those who need support to ensure their voice is heard and the right to have their dignity of risk acknowledged.

## Care Finder Program

The Older Person Team delivers our Care Finder Program. This is intensive support for vulnerable older people to access aged care and other local services. We help people navigate My Aged Care, understand the different types of aged care supports available to make an informed choice about their services, and when needed, assist people to connect with other relevant supports in the community, including health services, housing and homelessness supports.

## Outreach we delivered

Through the Older Persons Team, **ADACAS delivered 24 outreach sessions to 19 different community and Government organisations across the ACT.** The Team's efforts focused on advocacy, information sharing, and education to ensure that more people are aware of and able to access our services.

## Advocacy we provided

The Team handled **680 cases** and supported **450 clients.**



# Older People Education and Engagement

The **ADACAS Older Persons Team** plays a crucial role in ensuring people know about the support available to them. Through outreach activities, they connect with the community and provide vital information about ADACAS services, My Aged Care, and other key support systems.

The Team focuses on building strong relationships, especially with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, so everyone can access the advocacy and resources they need. By fostering these relationships, they help ensure that individuals in the ACT and beyond know where to turn for help and how to get the services they deserve.

The **ADACAS Older Persons Team**, participated in 86 community engagement events across 13 ACT public venues. These events were designed to raise awareness, build relationships, and engage with the community to strengthen referral pathways and inform older people about the value and support advocacy can provide.

## Key event achievements:

835 People Reached

348 Community engagement hours

Other community engagement, through planned education sessions on Aged Care Rights and awareness on the abuse of older people, reached 1703 more people across the ACT.

## The outcomes and impact of our work



A reduced sense of isolation and distress as they are supported to navigate access to My Aged Care.



Increased confidence to have their needs met when raising concerns with aged care service providers.



An increased level of quality services and care from having an advocate stand beside them when talking about concerns.



Reimbursement when overcharged by service providers or third parties and are no longer being taken advantage.



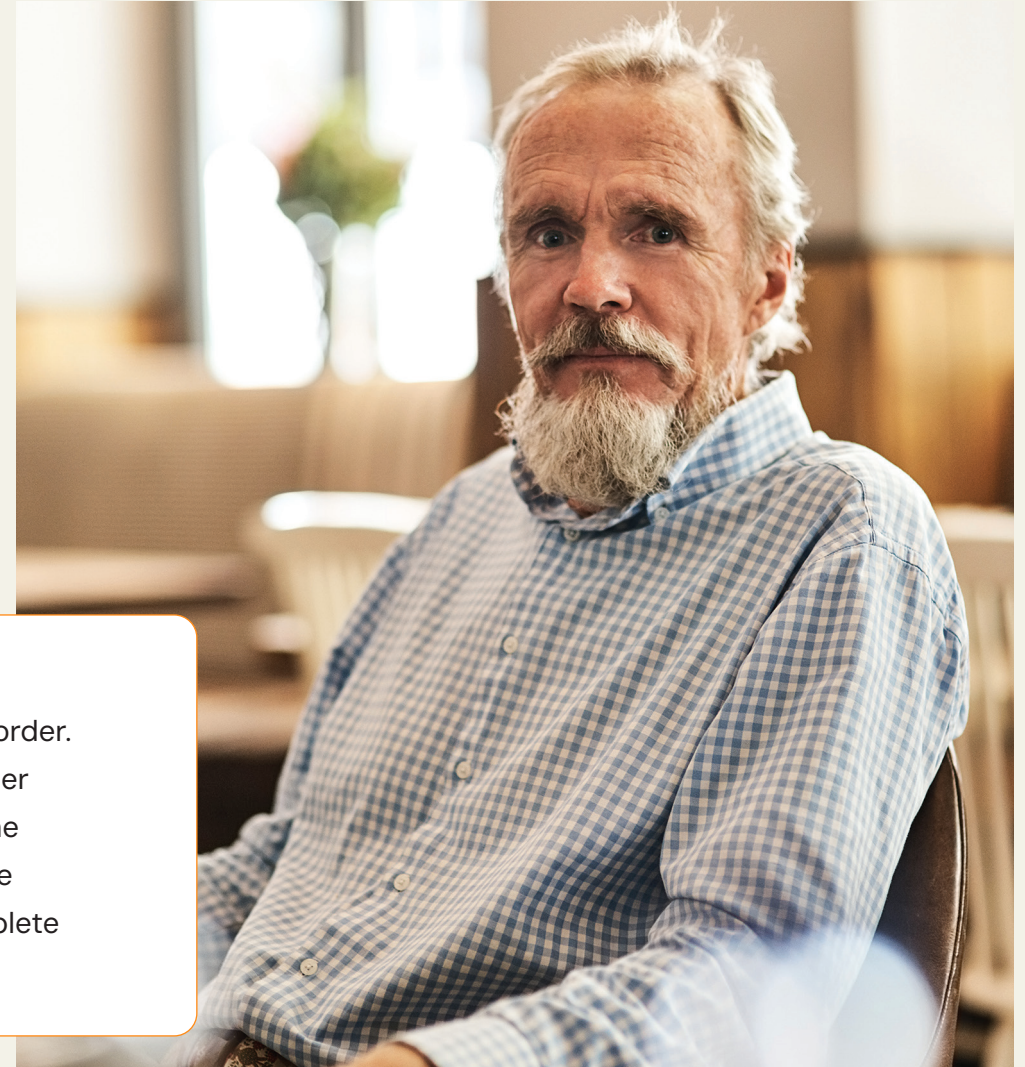
No longer feel invisible when dealing with medical professionals.



# Case Study 1:

## Patrick's Journey

How ADACAS helped Patrick resolve an unpaid Income Tested Care Fee debt.



### Background

Patrick\* is a 72-year-old man living with mental ill-health and hoarding disorder. Patrick entered into a Level 2 Home Care Package Agreement with a provider to support him with decluttering and cleaning up his home. After signing the Agreement, Patrick received one cleaning visit from the provider. Due to the level of clutter in the home, the provider advised they were unable to complete cleaning services and Patrick did not receive any further visits.

\*Not their real name or photograph.

# Patrick's Journey

## Challenge

After one year, Patrick was approached by a debt collector seeking to recover a \$4,000 debt for unpaid Income Tested Care Fees (ITCF) under the package Agreement. Patrick maintained that he had originally signed up with the provider over the phone. The provider's head office was in Queensland, and Patrick had not received any services from them after one initial cleaning visit. Patrick attempted to contact the provider on multiple occasions to resolve the debt matter, without success, and was very concerned that an outstanding debt would impact his credit record.

Patrick had trouble being heard by the provider and experienced communication barriers causing him increasing distress. Adding to the matter of an outstanding debt, Patrick was residing alone in a long-term private rental for the past 10 years and had recently been advised by the owner that they were going to sell the property.

## Support and action

Patrick was connected to a Financial Advocacy Officer in the ADACAS Older Persons Team. The advocate worked closely with Patrick to understand the outstanding ITCF charges and to identify if a referral to an external financial counsellor would be appropriate to address the validity of the debt and implications for his credit record. Through Supported Decision Making, Patrick decided he would like the advocate to assist with communication and undertake a preliminary investigation of the fees and charges with the provider.

## Impact / Conclusion



### **Upheld right to be listened to and understood:**

with support from ADACAS a review request was put forward in writing to the debt collector and the service provider. The request upheld Patrick's right to be listened to and informed about his services, including fees and charges, and in a way that he understood. The request also reinforced that charging ITCFs for a period of one year, without receipt of services, was unreasonable.



**A fair outcome:** in the end, the provider was unable to show evidence to Patrick or the ADACAS advocate that he had received more than one instance of service, or ongoing care management under the package to justify charging ITCFs. Patrick received a full waiver of the outstanding debt and collection proceedings were aborted.



**Support to understand options:** in developing the advocacy relationship around the ITCF issue, Patrick learnt about his aged care rights and was introduced to other options for support with local mental health and decluttering services. Patrick was concerned about accessing new services based on a negative experience with his aged care provider and was supported with a warm referral to the ADACAS care finder for intensive support to connect with new services.

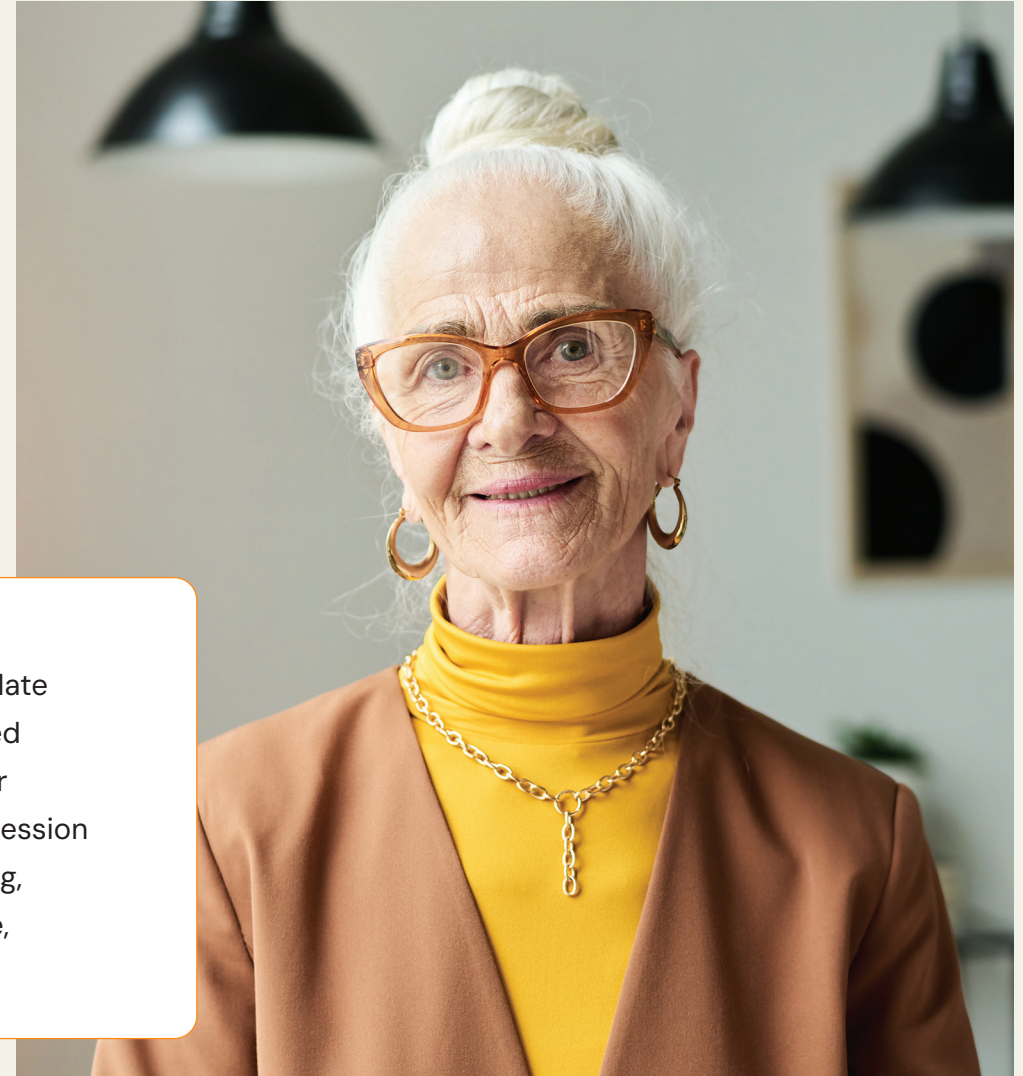
# Case Study 2:

## Sally's Journey

How an ADACAS Information Session supported Sally, a resident in aged care, to exercise their right to 'complain free from reprisal'.

### Background

Sally\* is an 83-year-old female living in a residential aged care home since late 2023. Sally moved to the home shortly after her husband, who has advanced dementia, to be closer to him. Sally contacted the Older Persons Team after attending an ADACAS Education Session held at the home. The Education Session focused on several key areas from the Charter of Aged Care Rights including, 'having control over and making decisions about the aspects of my daily life, financial affairs, and possessions', and to 'complain free from reprisal'.



\*Not their real name or photograph.



# Sally's Journey

## Challenge

Before considering a move into residential aged care, Sally investigated the arrangements for a private room and held an interview with the home. During the interview Sally felt encouraged and was informed by staff to bring whatever she wanted to her 'new home'. After moving to the home, Sally felt pressured by senior staff to sell her much-loved record collection and husband's train collection and collectibles. All this coming on the back of recently selling their family home. Sally exercised her right to make a complaint to the home. When staff spoke to Sally about her complaint, she felt unheard and in frustration raised her voice when staff again questioned her about selling items to downsize her room. As a repercussion, Sally was sent a letter from a lawyer on behalf of management stating she had breached the residents code of conduct and claiming that her behaviour was aggressive. Sally was now at risk of being asked to leave the home.

## Support and action

An ADACAS Older Persons Advocate went to speak with Sally about the letter and discussed her right to make a complaint without fear of reprisal and to have control over her possessions. The advocate helped Sally to understand her options, which included support to submit a letter of complaint to the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission for investigation.

## Impact



The outcome that Sally is looking to achieve is acknowledgement from staff at the aged care home that her complaint and voice matter. Sally would like her experience to be considered for improvements and changes.



The advocate attempted to communicate with senior management to reinforce that Sally has a right to complain free of reprisal, without it adversely affecting the way she is treated. Senior management were steadfast in holding their position and maintaining that Sally acted aggressively to staff.



Sally has never in her lifetime had to deal with these types of legal matters and feels this has deeply impacted their final years of life.

## Conclusion

Sally is still living at the aged care home and sees her husband daily. Sally has described her relationship with a senior staff member as 'stressful and difficult' and reported the relationship started to decline when Sally challenged matters in relation to the possessions she kept in her room. Sally feels she is not valued as a resident in 'her home' and that her voice is not heard, or respected. Sally feels she has been pressured into submission and does not want to leave her 'home' or her husband whose dementia is gradually evolving.

# Advocacy services for people living with disability & experiencing mental ill-health

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As reported last year, we saw a significant increase in the demand for advocacy services to support people experiencing mental ill-health.

Our Team regularly provides outreach into a number of mental health facilities across Canberra, ensuring that the people residing in these facilities are able to seek the support of an advocate who can assist them in addressing an issue or concern in their lives.

The Team has noted a rising demand for community mental health services, along with increasing concerns regarding barriers to accessing timely and affordable care from psychiatrists and psychologists.

Many people need ADACAS after leaving mental health facilities, as they navigate a complex and often under-resourced system. Our Advocates have achieved remarkable outcomes for those experiencing mental ill-health, and we continue to work closely with professionals in both the mental health and justice systems to ensure the best possible outcomes for our clients.



Over the last year, we have seen an increase in referrals to **support parents with disability** engaged with child protection, and often, Advocates are asked to help a person who is at risk of losing their child with only an hour's notice. We have supported people who need access to the NDIS and this has enabled us to have regular outreach sessions in custodial settings where we have seen significant need for advocacy relating to other justice matters.

Our Intake Team is also able to provide information and advice to the many people living with disability and mental ill-health who are seeking support. This can be achieved by giving them the information and assistance so they can self-advocate. People reaching out for assistance are encouraged to remain in contact and seek additional information and assistance as needed while being encouraged to feel empowered and build their own agency and capacity.



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The Mental Health & Disability Team conducted over 100 hours of outreach across the ACT, aiming to expand our reach to priority groups and individuals with special needs.

The Team has successfully established regular outreach services to key locations, including the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC), Yedding Mura, AHMU, Step Up Step Down, and UC Hospital. These efforts help us ensure that more people from diverse and vulnerable communities can access our services.





The Disability Team has a more focused approach to supporting people who are residing in hospital through funding received from the CATS program. The ADACAS staff have been engaging with social workers and clinical staff informing them of the value of advocacy and working in partnership to assist people leave hospital safely. This is a service that supports people with disability as well as people who are over the age of 65 years old. The advocates often use a model of supported decision making to work with clients around key areas of their life such as their future home life and support services.

The NSW Disability Team covers a wide area of the state supporting people with disability. Across much of the state we are working with people to ensure their voices are heard and rights upheld around key matters such as housing, education, health and justice matters and this is associated with our NSW Government funding. The team regularly engages with other service providers working in partnership to support vulnerable members of the community across these regions.

The demand for advocacy is really starting to increase and we see that a lot of the matters have an association to their NDIS packages. The reform processes around the NDIS are seeing many people worse off or losing access to much needed services. We are grateful for the funding received through the NDAP program to help us assist many of these clients.



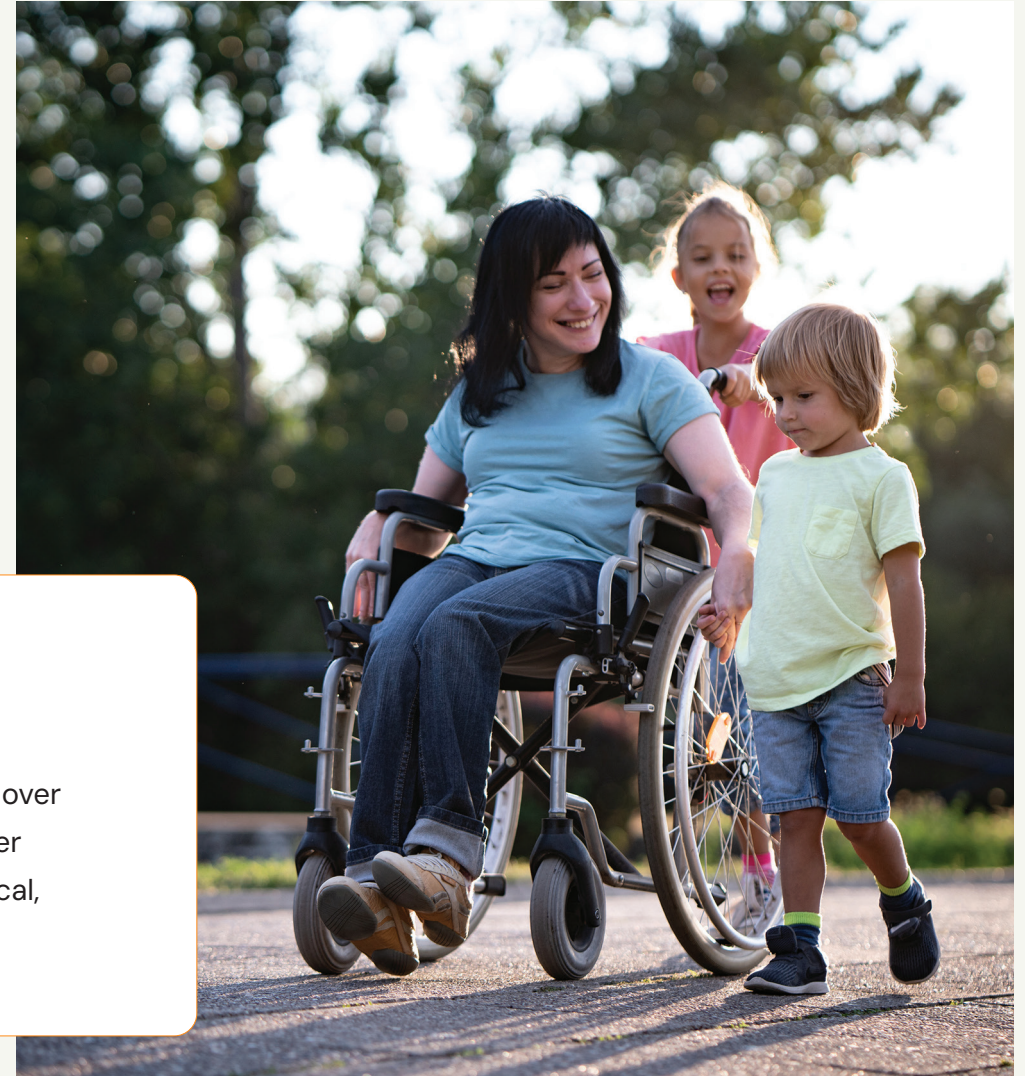
# Case Study 3:

## Veronica's Journey

How ADACAS supported her through a custody dispute.

### Background

Veronica\*, a 35-year-old woman living with a physical disability, was going through a difficult separation from her partner and facing a custody battle over their two young children, both under four years old. As the primary caregiver since their birth, Veronica had independently managed her children's medical, educational, and social needs.



\*Not their real name or photograph.



# Veronica's Journey

## Challenge

Recently, Veronica's former partner stopped her from seeing their children, claiming that her disability was a concern. Veronica felt that her ex-partner was using her disability to unfairly argue that she couldn't properly care for their children, trying to gain full custody by portraying her as an unfit parent.

With an important court hearing coming up to decide custody arrangements, Veronica was worried about facing bias due to her disability. Although she had a lawyer, she also reached out to ADACAS for extra support, fearing that her rights as a parent might not be taken seriously.

## Support and action

ADACAS quickly prioritised Veronica's case, understanding the urgency of the situation. An advocate worked closely with Veronica to help her understand her rights as both a parent and a person with a disability.

Initially, Veronica was nervous about sharing everything, fearing that her struggles might be seen negatively. However, with the advocate's guidance, she felt more confident about speaking up and ensuring the court heard her side of the story.

## Impact



**A Fairer Custody Decision:** In the end, the court ruled that Veronica, and her ex-partner should have shared custody of their children. While Veronica would have liked more time with her children, this decision allowed them to stay connected with both parents, which was incredibly important to her. The arrangement will be reviewed as the children grow. Veronica felt good about the outcome.



**Confidence and Advocacy Skills:** With an ADACAS advocate by her side, Veronica gained the confidence to advocate for herself and her rights as a parent. She learned more about her legal rights and felt empowered to push back against the unfair assumptions made about her ability to care for her children because of her disability.



**Support Through a Tough Time:** The ADACAS advocate didn't just help Veronica prepare for court—they also provided emotional support, helping her feel safe and more at ease during a very challenging time. This extra layer of support helped Veronica overcome her fear of being discriminated against and gave her the strength to continue fighting for her parenting rights.

## Conclusion

Veronica's experience highlights how crucial advocacy services are, especially for people with disability facing difficult legal situations. With the support of an ADACAS advocate, Veronica was able to secure a fair custody arrangement and ensure that her children would continue to have a strong relationship with both parents.

While Veronica's case with ADACAS has now ended, she knows that the custody process isn't over. However with the confidence and knowledge she gained, Veronica feels ready to continue advocating for her rights as a parent, knowing that her disability doesn't define her ability to care for and love her children.



# Case Study 4:

## Vu's Journey

How ADACAS is helping her through a tough legal battle.

### Background

Vu\*, a 60-year-old woman of CALD background, lives with lifelong mental illness alongside chronic health conditions, including diabetes and arrhythmia. She finds herself in the midst a complex legal battle, facing charges of animal cruelty after her beloved dog, Max, and her cat, Luna, were taken away. At the time of the incident, Vu was hospitalised due to her health issues, and she claims that someone else was responsible for caring for her pets. Max and Luna are not just animals to Vu; they are her emotional support companions, providing her with comfort and companionship through her struggles.



\*Not their real name or photograph.

# Vu's Journey

## Challenge

Vu has a long history of mental health challenges and has experienced homelessness, which has made it difficult for her to trust the systems meant to help her. She feels misunderstood and believes the legal process has been biased against her, particularly due to her mental health status and past experiences. The stress from the court case has taken a significant toll on Vu's health, exacerbating her diabetes and arrhythmia and leading to heightened anxiety and emotional distress. When she sought help from a legal service, they advised her to consider a guilty plea for a lesser sentence. However, Vu felt this was not the right approach, as she wanted to explain her circumstances and clarify that she wasn't responsible for the care of Max and Luna while she was hospitalised. Concerned about the emotional strain of the trial potentially triggering serious health episodes, Vu reached out to ADACAS for support.

## Support and action

ADACAS understood that Vu required assistance not only with the legal process but also with managing her personal challenges. An advocate worked closely with her to ensure her voice would be heard in court, particularly in addressing the biases that might arise due to her mental illness and experiences of homelessness. They also provided emotional support, helping Vu manage her anxiety and stress as the court date approached. Recognising the potential impact of stress on her health, Vu secured a medical certificate that could excuse her from attending the hearing if necessary. ADACAS stood by her throughout the process, even when Vu felt frustrated with the slow pace of the proceedings.

## Impact



**Standing Up Against Bias:** With ADACAS by her side, Vu was better prepared to advocate for herself in court. Her advocate helped her understand her rights and gave her the confidence to challenge the assumptions that might be made regarding her ability to care for Max and Luna because of her mental health status.



**Support Through Crisis:** Throughout the legal battle, Vu faced significant mental health crises, feeling overwhelmed and hopeless at times. In moments of distress, when she felt particularly vulnerable, ADACAS ensured she received the necessary support, facilitating access to mental health services and wellness checks as needed.



**Continued Advocacy Despite Setbacks:** Even when Vu became disillusioned with the legal process, ADACAS remained committed to support her. They recognised how difficult it was for her as she felt unheard. The advocate walked alongside Vu throughout the issue, consistently advocated for her and ensuring she had strong support throughout her challenging journey.

## Conclusion

Vu's story illustrates the overwhelming nature of legal battles, especially for individuals grappling with mental health challenges, chronic conditions, and experiences of homelessness. Vu has felt that ADACAS has been an invaluable ally, providing the advocacy and emotional support she needed to navigate a system that often feels unwelcoming. While the court case is ongoing, ADACAS is dedicated to ensuring Vu's voice is heard and that she receives the fair treatment she deserves. Everyone deserves equitable treatment, and ADACAS is committed to protecting Vu's rights throughout this process.



# Support we provide to young people

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## Supported Decision Making

ADACAS has been working with young people living with disability to build their capacity to make their own decisions. The Supported Decision Making toolkit has continued to evolve over the last number of years to support young people to transition from making what might seem a small decision, such as “what shall I wear today”, to more complex decisions, such as “moving out of home”. This program supports the young person and their immediate network, which is most often their family, so everyone can gain confidence around decision-making and understanding of risks or consequences, ensuring a dignity of risk approach. This program has been delivered to schools across Canberra, and the Team is now looking to deliver it in other settings to support a different group of young people.





# Case Study 5:

## Brian's Journey

How ADACAS helped navigate the NDIS application.

### Background

Brian\*, a 45-year-old man living with a disability, reached out to ADACAS for help with his application to join the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The application process had recently changed, requiring applicants to create a community connections plan that outlines their goals and available support. While this plan doesn't involve funding, it is used to help assess if someone is eligible for the NDIS.



\*Not their real name or photograph.

# Brian's Journey

## Challenge

Brian encountered several issues during the application process. After attending two meetings with a Local Area Coordinator (LAC), he noticed that the first LAC had included inaccurate information in his community connections plan. When Brian requested corrections at a second meeting, the new LAC informed him that the content couldn't be changed once it had been written. This made Brian concerned that the mistakes could misrepresent his needs. He felt it was vital that the community connections plan properly reflect his lived experience and that his voice be acknowledged.

Brian also had a report from his GP that he felt accurately described his disability needs, but the second LAC dismissed its importance, saying that the final plan and the evidence submitted to the NDIS were their responsibility. To complicate matters further, Brian was wrongly told he couldn't file a complaint because he wasn't officially a participant in the NDIS yet. Feeling overwhelmed and frustrated by the lack of support, Brian knew he needed help. He asked ADACAS for an advocate to accompany him to the final meeting and ensure his voice was heard.

## Support and action

Once Brian connected with ADACAS, things improved. His advocate helped him address the inaccuracies in the community connections plan, ensuring it better reflected his actual needs. The advocate also guided Brian through the correct process for making a NDIS access request and clarified what should happen at each step. The ADACAS advocate listened to Brian and advised him on how to submit his evidence properly, even though the LAC had previously provided confusing instructions for investigation.

## Impact



**Accurate Representation:** With ADACAS's support, Brian was able to correct the errors in his community connections plan. This ensured that the information submitted to the NDIS accurately represented his needs and circumstances.



**Clarity and Confidence:** With an advocate by his side, Brian gained a clearer understanding of the NDIS process and his rights, reducing his stress and confusion. The support he received helped him feel more in control of his situation. Most importantly, Brian finally felt that his voice was heard.



**Highlighting Systemic Issues:** Brian's experience also highlighted broader issues with how changes to the NDIS process have been communicated. ADACAS raised these concerns, advocating for clearer and more consistent communication to prevent others from facing similar problems.

## Conclusion

Brian's journey through the NDIS application process demonstrates the importance of advocacy services in ensuring individuals receive the support they need. ADACAS helped Brian address the issues in his application and provided much-needed reassurance and guidance through a complicated and often confusing process. While Brian was initially told that the wait time for a decision on his application would be about three months, ADACAS believes it could take up to seven months due to ongoing delays. This case underscores the value of having an advocate when navigating complex systems like the NDIS, ensuring your voice is heard and your needs are truly understood. Through ADACAS, Brian regained confidence and felt supported in his journey to access the services he needs.





## Our Program Delivery



# Enhancing our services

## Employer Confidence Program

We believe that everyone deserves the chance to contribute their skills and talents, including people living with disability. The Employer Confidence Program supports businesses to create workplaces where everyone can thrive.

With one in five Australians of working age living with disability, this program helps bridge the gap, as currently only 48% of people living with disability are employed, compared to 80% of the general population.



## Why it matters

Hiring people living with disability isn't just the right thing to do—it's great for business. Employees living with disability often stay in their jobs longer, take fewer sick days, and bring fresh perspectives that enhance teamwork and problem-solving. Inclusive workplaces aren't just more welcoming; they're stronger and more resilient.

## How we help

We work directly with employers to boost their confidence in hiring and supporting people living with disability.

Through workshops and tailored support, we help businesses:

- Understand the benefits of inclusive hiring.
- Break down myths and uncertainties about employing people living with disability.
- Identify any simple adjustments that might be needed to help employees succeed.

By focusing on what people can do rather than any limitations, we help businesses tap into a diverse talent pool, creating a more innovative and supportive workplace for everyone.

## Creating lasting impact

The Employer Confidence Program benefits businesses and the wider community by offering people living with disability more opportunities to contribute and thrive. It has been extremely pleasing to see that some of our clients who have sought advocacy are sometimes referred to this program to help them gain employment. With our support, businesses can create inclusive workplaces that benefit their staff and strengthen their reputation and community connections.

## NDIS Appeals Service

Our NDIS Appeals Service provides essential advice, information, and advocacy for people who do not agree with decisions made by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA). These decisions can include determining who can access the NDIS, the amount of funding allocated in an individual's NDIS plan, and what types of support the funding can cover. Our Advocates support individuals through the internal and external review process, ensuring they have the help they need to challenge these decisions.

We are committed to ensuring individuals feel empowered and supported in navigating these critical processes.



## Redress Service

Through our Redress Service, we support people who have experienced sexual abuse in institutions, helping them seek justice, healing, and closure. The National Redress Scheme was established in response to the abuse experienced by children in various institutions, such as orphanages, schools, churches, disability services, and sports clubs. This Scheme offers survivors acknowledgement, apology, financial payment, and access to free legal advice and counselling.

We assist people in the ACT and NSW South Coast to apply to the Scheme, using trauma-informed practices to ensure that they remain safe and in control throughout the process. We help survivors explore their options, prepare their personal statements, and reflect on how abuse has impacted their lives. We help survivors navigate this process, ensuring they feel empowered to take steps toward healing and justice.

This is a free service, and we have supported 51 people over the last year, including ongoing support through the partnership program.





# Case Study 6:

## Melinda's Journey

How ADACAS helped Melinda overcome barriers to employment.

### Background

Melinda\*, a 28-year-old highly educated policy worker who is deaf, reached out to ADACAS after being involved in a serious car accident that resulted in the loss of her job. As a non-resident in Australia, she was ineligible for Government benefits, which made it increasingly difficult for her to find a new job and access the necessary resources.

**Identifying barriers:** Melinda faced several significant challenges:

**Residency Status:** As a non-permanent resident, she was unable to obtain the clearances required for public service jobs or access Government services like Job Access, which could have provided funding for essential workplace adjustments.

**Communication Access:** Melinda needed specialised communication tools and resources to perform her job effectively, but her residency status hindered her ability to secure funding for these accommodations.

**Anxiety About Driving:** The trauma from the car accident left Melinda feeling anxious about driving, making her reliant on public transport for potential job opportunities—something she had little experience with previously and no assistance to learn.



\*Not their real name or photograph.



# Melinda's Journey

## Action plan and support services

ADACAS collaborated with Melinda and her employment officer to develop a plan to address these challenges:

- 1 Engagement with Deaf Services:** ADACAS reached out to organisations that support deaf individuals to explore ways to assist Melinda with her workplace needs. Although full funding for specialised equipment was unavailable, they offered guidance on securing necessary tools for effective communication.
- 2 Resume Enhancement and Job-Seeking Tools:** ADACAS organised Zoom meetings (with the help of interpreters) to enhance Melinda's resume and job-seeking skills, providing her with practical tools and strategies to improve her job search.
- 3 Exploring Remote Work Opportunities:** Recognising that Melinda's home setup could support remote work, ADACAS investigated job opportunities that would allow her to work from a comfortable and accessible environment, alleviating her anxiety about commuting.
- 4 Funding and Community Support:** ADACAS searched for additional funding sources for Melinda's workplace adjustments through community hubs, although initial efforts did not yield results. Despite this, they maintained regular contact with her, keeping her informed about job openings that didn't require residency. The ADACAS advocate connected her to the ADACAS Team who are delivering the Employer Confidence Program.
- 5 Temporary Employment and Networking:** Through a connection with ADACAS' Employer Confidence Program, Melinda was invited to speak at an event. Her exceptional communication skills caught the attention of potential employers, leading to a casual job offer that provided a vital opportunity while she awaited approval for her permanent residency (PR) application.

## Outcome

While working casually, Melinda was able to save money, and once her PR was approved, she felt a sense of relief and accomplishment. With her PR secured, Melinda is now in a much stronger position to pursue her career aspirations and has begun to rebuild her confidence in driving.

## Future Steps

With her PR in hand, Melinda and her connection to the ADACAS Team in the Employer Confidence Program, Melinda will continue applying for positions that require security clearances. Equipped with her qualifications and newly acquired skills, Melinda is focused on finding a stable, accessible position in the public service sector while gradually working on her confidence to drive again.

## Conclusion

Melinda's journey highlights the difficulties non-residents living with disability face in securing employment. However, it also emphasises the effectiveness of individual advocacy and support. The One ADACAS philosophy saw Melinda being able to access individual advocacy whilst also being supported by the ADACAS Employer Confidence Program Team. Melinda found temporary work and is now well-positioned to pursue the long-term career she has worked tirelessly for. With consistent support and innovative solutions, Melinda is on track to achieve the future she deserves.



# The impact we can have

## What is the impact of employment programs for people living with disability?

When we committed ourselves to delivering The Employer Confidence Program, we knew that supporting businesses in creating inclusive workplaces can have significant positive impacts on people living with disability.

It's about diving in and supporting those people living with disability who want to work! The impact we want is change—a change that helps people achieve greater financial independence and social connection.



The impact we want is change – a change that helps people achieve greater financial independence and social connection.





# Our Systemic Advocacy



# What we provide

Systemic advocacy means working to seek change in systems that provide support or affect the rights of people.



We have been involved in systemic advocacy for many years and prioritise topics with the greatest impact on our clients.

Over the last year, we have pivoted our approach to systemic advocacy to highlight the trends from the issues raised by clients seeking individual advocacy.

Through our systemic advocacy, we seek to influence local and National policies to improve the lives of the people we work with:

people with  
disability

people experiencing  
mental ill-health

older persons

We make formal submissions to Governments and Inquiries, participate in formal and informal consultations, and advocate for change by working directly with:

ministers

government  
departments

statutory  
organisations

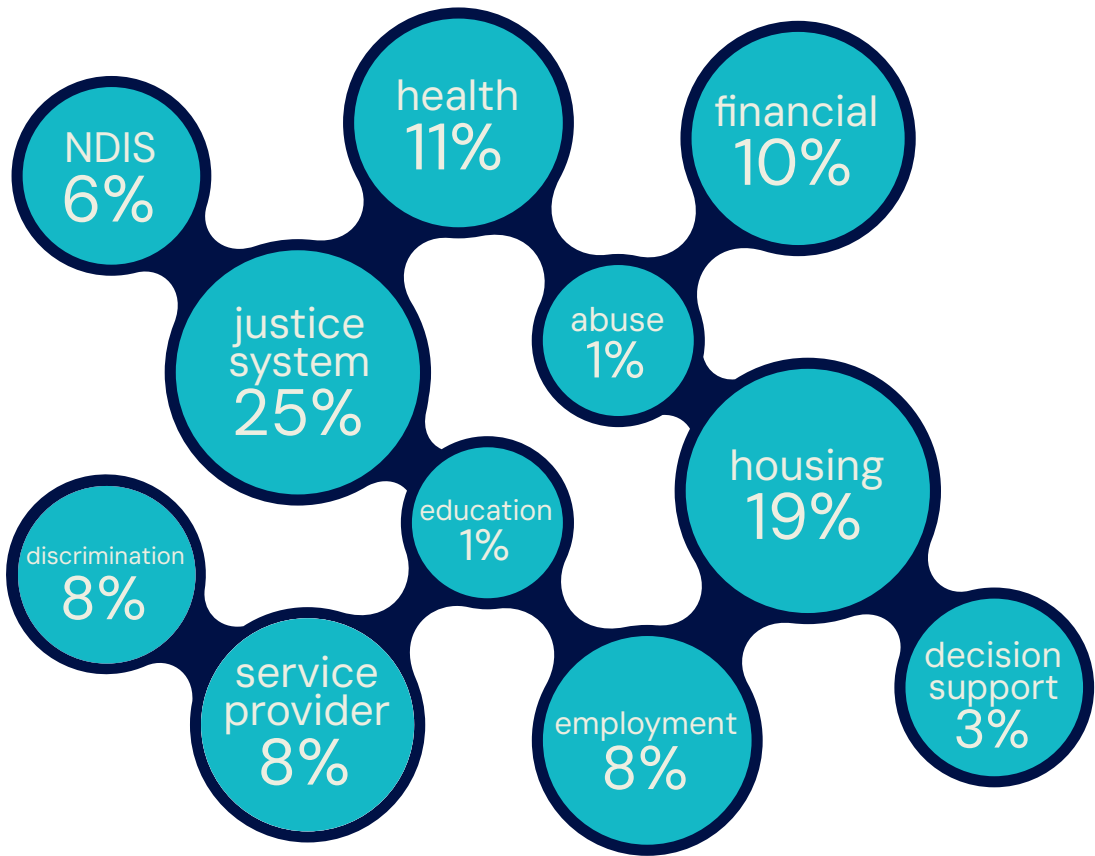
community  
organisations

businesses

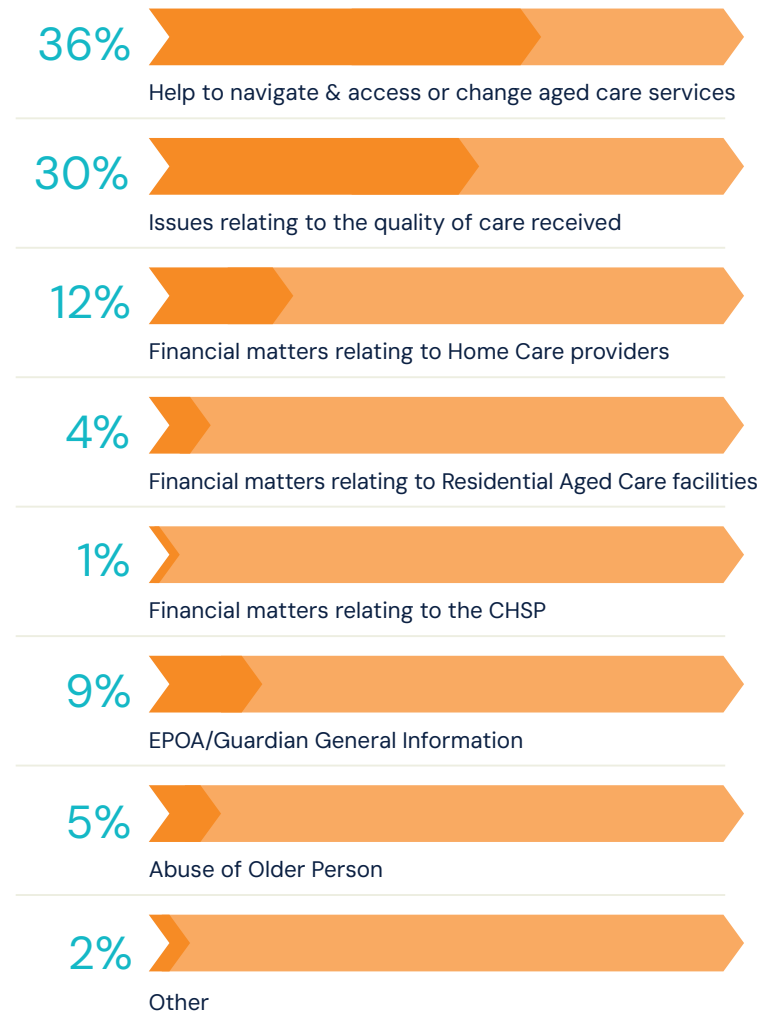
This year, our Teams saw a trend in Justice System and Housing issues, followed closely by NDIS issues.

This correlated with the increasing complexity that our Advocates experience when navigating cases, resulting in an increase in advocacy hours.

Issues reported to our Disability and Mental Health Teams



Issues reported to our Older Persons Team



For the clients who sit within our Older Persons Teams’ scope, we note that aged care service access and service quality remain the two leading issues encountered by our Advocates.

This year, we focused on these advocacy priorities:



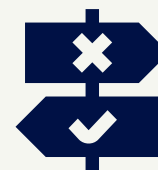
**Housing and homelessness** – alongside partner organisations, we continue to advocate for increases in social and community housing.

We also advocate for improved experiences for those in contact with housing and homelessness support services.

We play a significant role in supporting clients impacted by the Government Growth and Renewal Program. We work with the Government on the desired outcome of having adequate housing for vulnerable members of our community.

### **Guardianship and Enduring Power of Attorney**

– we advocate for improved Guardianship and Enduring Power of Attorney processes to prevent potential abuse through misuse of decision-making arrangements.



We advocate for consultation, education and inclusion of older people and people with disability in the process.

**Help for those who are not NDIS-eligible** – We are working with other advocacy agencies to campaign for more support to be available for people with a disability living in NSW and the ACT who are not NDIS-eligible.



**Disability justice** – we actively participate in the ACT Government Disability Justice Strategy to improve support for our client group.

We are a member of the ACT Corrective Services Disability Reference Group to action change.



### **National Disability Insurance Scheme**

– we focus on issues related to NDIS legislative reform, advocating for the rights of people with disability to be upheld.

We call for genuine co-design. We have advocated for Foundational Supports to be developed in consultation with people with disability, as a priority.

**Aged care reform** – we have participated in various forums on reforms to the aged care system and in building a new Rights-Based Aged Care Act. ADACAS has also contributed to the Canberra Age-Friendly City Plan, and our CEO is a member of the ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing.







### Emergency planning

— we advocated for the human rights

of our clients in emergency responses. They have the right to be included and supported in appropriate ways in crisis planning and emergency responses to natural disasters.

ADACAS participated in a number of workshops to design the ACT Social Recovery Framework and ACT Disaster Resilience Strategy.

### Abuse, violence, neglect and exploitation

— we continue to engage in discussions following the release of the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety and the Royal Commission into the Abuse, Violence, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.



A key area has been Foundational Support for people with disability and support for people who are “falling through the cracks” as they are unable to access the NDIS and are too young to access My Aged Care.

### Child protection

— we have continued to advocate for child protection system change and to improve support for parents when child protection processes are occurring.

ADACAS and AFI designed a program to support parents living with a disability and were pleased that partial funding was identified in the ACT Government FY2025 budget.



### Improved health outcomes

— we continue to advocate for improved health outcomes to ensure equitable access to healthcare, improving healthcare quality, and expanding access to health advocacy arrangements.

We participated in the ACT Prevention Health Action Plan focused on Older People and are a member of the ACT Government’s Territory Wide Health Workforce Planning Group. ADACAS also participates in the North Canberra Consumer Engagement Representative Forum.



### Improved mental health supports

— we continue to advocate for improved access to and quality of services and supports for people experiencing mental ill-health. We are also advocating for people experiencing mental ill-health to have their rights upheld under the Mental Health Act and receive adequate and ongoing support when transitioning back into the community from being an inpatient.





# The impact we can have

## What is the impact of our Systemic Advocacy?

When we talk about systemic advocacy at ADACAS, we're really talking about creating positive, long-lasting changes that improve the lives of people. It's about tackling the big picture issues that affect many people rather than just focusing on individual cases. Through these efforts, our systemic advocacy can quietly but powerfully improve the everyday experiences of people living with disability and older people.



The impact we want is change – a change that helps people live their best lives.



Detail from "Wings of Advocacy"



# Our Reconciliation Action Plan



# How we have progressed

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This past year, we have made exciting strides on our reconciliation journey. We are thrilled to have progressed from a Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) to an Innovate RAP, marking a shift from planning and reflection to taking real, impactful action across the organisation.

## Strengthening connections with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Our relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have continued to grow throughout the year. We've focused on outreach programs that provide support for people with disability and people experiencing mental ill-health, making sure we reach those who need us the most.

This year, a significant part of our work has been collaborating with **Aboriginal community-controlled organisations** and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients with **Redress applications**, ensuring their voices are heard and their rights protected.

Thanks to funding from the Department of Social Services, we have continued to have a dedicated staff member to support the entire ADACAS Team in engaging more closely with the community. **The Aboriginal Advocate** role is a critically important position to ensure that we are resourced to have a consistent and long-term presence to continue building relationships and trust to offer our services and advocacy support.

## Our commitment to cultural safety

ADACAS is deeply committed to being a culturally safe and welcoming service. We're always learning and improving, and this year, we took part in several important cultural activities. We hosted a **Yarning Circle** with the **First Peoples Disability Network**, giving us a space to listen and learn. We also connected with **local leaders from the Galambany Circle Sentencing panel**, which helped us better understand the needs of the community.

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## Celebrating culture and raising awareness

In early 2024, we welcomed **Selina Walker** to lead a **Welcome to Country** at our **Organisational Culture Day** and a **Water Blessing** ceremony in March. These events encouraged reflection and brought our Team closer to understanding the significance of reconciliation. We also worked with artist **Sarah Richards** from **Marrawuy Journey** to create a beautiful artwork called **"Wings of Advocacy"**; symbolising our ongoing commitment to reconciliation. This artwork was created with input from our staff, making it a true collective effort.

## Looking ahead

As we move forward, we remain dedicated to embedding reconciliation into everything we do. In the coming year, we will expand our outreach, further develop culturally safe practices, and continue working hand-in-hand with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities to create lasting, positive change.

Our Innovate RAP, developed in partnership with local Aboriginal people, sets out how we will strengthen relationships to benefit the communities we work in and ensure there is an ongoing learning and listening culture with staff.

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## Expanding access to support

We've made great efforts to ensure that our services are accessible to **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients**, and we're proud to see more people from these communities reaching out to us. However, we know there's still more to do, especially to strengthen our outreach efforts so that everyone in the community knows about ADACAS and can access our services.







# Our Workplace



# A great place to work

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At ADACAS, we believe that fostering a positive and inclusive workplace culture is essential to our Team's well-being and professional growth. Throughout the 2023–2024 financial year, we focused on creating a supportive environment that promotes cultural awareness, personal development, and strong employee engagement.

The ADACAS staff have a diverse knowledge base, so ensuring they can seek information and guidance from their peers across the organisation is a real value for everyone and also benefits our clients.

This year, we rolled out **One ADACAS**. This has seen our Teams work more collaboratively and better understand each others challenges and successes.







## Creating a supportive work environment

Our workplace culture is enhanced through regular team-building activities and community engagement. From painting sessions to cultural learning experiences and opportunities to participate in professional development and training sessions, we encourage our staff to collaborate and connect on a deeper level. These activities help to create an environment where staff feel valued, supported, and engaged in the organisation's mission.

We regularly have our NSW staff come to Canberra to join us when we undertake professional development sessions.

Each year, we undertake a staff engagement survey and then work together to address the areas for improvement.

Staff can access EAP services for personal or work-related matters to assist them in their well-being, and ADACAS also offers clinical supervision for the Advocates as part of their professional development.

Learning from others is also an important aspect, and we have been delighted to hear from all of the Official Visitors, Meridian staff, and Safe Home Service, and to receive training on neurodiversity.

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## Looking ahead

As we continue into the next financial year, we remain committed to building on this foundation. We will continue implementing our RAP, improving employee engagement, and enhancing our advocacy services. Our focus will remain on creating a workplace where every team member feels valued and supported and cultural awareness and respect are embedded in everything we do.

We look forward to another year of growth, learning, and positive impact on our employees and our communities. We will explore measuring the impact of our Workplace Culture and Employee Well-Being initiatives in a range of ways, including conducting Pulse Surveys with staff, reviewing retention data, and extending our internal feedback mechanisms.





# Our Future Directions



# Where we are headed

In the coming year, ADACAS is focused on growing our services and making an even more significant impact while keeping the needs of our clients at the centre of everything we do. One of our main projects will focus on building our knowledge and expertise to measure and report our impact. This will focus on our data collection and how we measure success. This will help us better understand how clients are progressing, how far our advocacy is reaching, and what feedback we're getting from community events.

We'll also work on expanding our Supported Decision Making (SDM) framework and tools, checking how well clients are using and understanding them.





**We Partner  
for Impact!**



At ADACAS, we believe in the power of partnerships to create meaningful change and impact.

Our collaborations helped us reach more people and strengthen our advocacy in the communities we serve.

**Redress Program** – One of our important partnerships was through the Redress Program, where we support people who have experienced institutional sexual abuse. By teaming up with other organisations, we saw a 68% increase in Redress cases, ensuring more people could access the justice and support they needed.

### **Community and Government Agencies**

– Through our Outreach Program, we also worked closely with 19 community and Government organisations. Together, we raised awareness about advocacy services and strengthened community networks. This resulted in more referrals and allowed us to support people who might not have known where to find help.

### **Employer Confidence Program**

We worked with various business partners to help them confidently employ people living with disability.

The ECP focuses on breaking down barriers and assisting workplaces to be more inclusive by supporting businesses with recruitment, reasonable adjustments, and disability awareness.

### **Consultation with Government**

We engaged in the consultations on the Voluntary Assisted Dying legislation, Growth and Renewal Housing Program, the Disability Inclusion Bill, and the ACT Social Recovery Framework, helping us address key systemic challenges that impact our clients' lives.

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities**

– Our dedication to reconciliation was strengthened through partnerships with the First Peoples Disability Network, including hosting a Yarning circle and connecting with Aboriginal Leaders from the Galambany Circle Sentencing Panel. These efforts have allowed us to create more culturally safe and supportive services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

**Individual Advocacy Services** – Our collaboration and engagement with institutions such as the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) and the Adult Mental Health Unit (AMC) and organisations such as Yedding Murra, Meridian and Feros Care as well as the Official Visitors and Social Workers in the hospitals has enabled us to provide our individual advocacy service to many of the most vulnerable people living with disability and mental ill-health. The NSW team also participated in a range of networking events and built relationships with key stakeholders across the justice and education system as well as other disability advocacy organisations which saw a significant increase in demand.

Individual advocacy to support Older Canberrans has been supported through our engagement with a number of multicultural organisations, COTA, Residential Aged Care Facilities and many of the community groups across Canberra. It is through this work that we can discuss systemic matters that relate to the quality of services that people experience and highlight the key issues that people are seeking support for to the Aged Care Quality Safety Commission with OPAN.



Our partnerships have been central to the impact we've had this year.



# Profile 1: Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN)

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The Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) is a national organisation focused on ensuring older Australians have their voices heard and their rights respected, particularly within the aged care system. OPAN is funded under the National Aged Care Advocacy Program (NACAP) to provide free and confidential advocacy services through a network of member organisations, including ADACAS, across Australia. Their work is centred on empowering older people to understand their rights and have the support they need when making important decisions about their care.

## How we work together

**Through our partnership with OPAN, ADACAS provides advocacy services directly to older individuals.** This includes helping people navigate the complexities of aged care, upholding their rights, and offering support when challenges arise. Together, we work to promote aged care reform and improve the overall well-being of older Australians.

## Our shared impact

**In collaboration with OPAN, ADACAS helps deliver vital advocacy services to the community.** Together, we contribute to the national effort to ensure that older people are treated with dignity and respect. OPAN's work extends across Australia, reaching thousands of older people every year and helping them feel more empowered and supported. For more details about OPAN's important work, visit [open.org.au](https://open.org.au).



# Profile 2: Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA)

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Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA) brings together independent advocacy organisations across the country to create a unified, stronger voice for people living with disability. As a national leader in advocacy, DANA works to support organisations like ADACAS in their mission to promote and protect the rights of people living with disability. By fostering collaboration and offering guidance, DANA helps ensure that advocacy services are accessible, impactful, and responsive to the needs of the disability community.

## Our collaborative efforts

**Partnering with DANA allows ADACAS to be part of a national movement focused on making sure every person with a disability has the opportunity to access independent advocacy.** By working with DANA, ADACAS can amplify the voices of people living with disability in policy discussions and public conversations. DANA's leadership provides a framework that strengthens our advocacy efforts, ensuring we can offer effective support to those who need it.

## Making a difference together

**Being part of DANA's network enables ADACAS to contribute to a broader vision of inclusion and equality for people living with disability.** With DANA's backing, ADACAS can better advocate for systemic change, aiming for a future where disability rights are respected and individuals have the autonomy and support they need. This partnership strengthens both our organisation and the advocacy landscape as a whole.

For more information about DANA, visit [dana.org.au](https://dana.org.au).







# Financial Overview

# Financials

Below is a summary of the financial performance of ADACAS.

<b>Revenue</b> (money received to do our work)	<b>\$5,354,477</b>
<b>Expenses</b> (money spent to do our work)	<b>\$5,161,991</b>
<b>Surplus</b> (money left over)	<b>\$192,486</b>
<b>Reserves</b> (money in the bank)	<b>\$2,698,167</b>

## Where we get our money from

Commonwealth	<b>\$2,998,669</b>
ACT Government Funding	<b>\$1,114,117</b>
NSW Government Funding	<b>\$1,104,073</b>
Other ADACAS Income	<b>\$137,618</b>

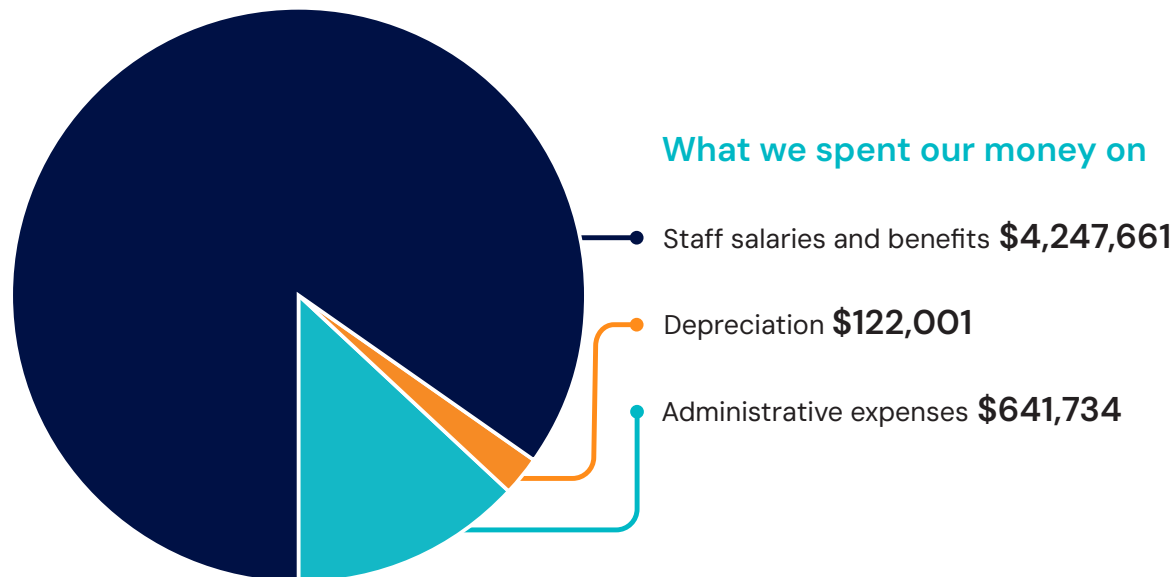
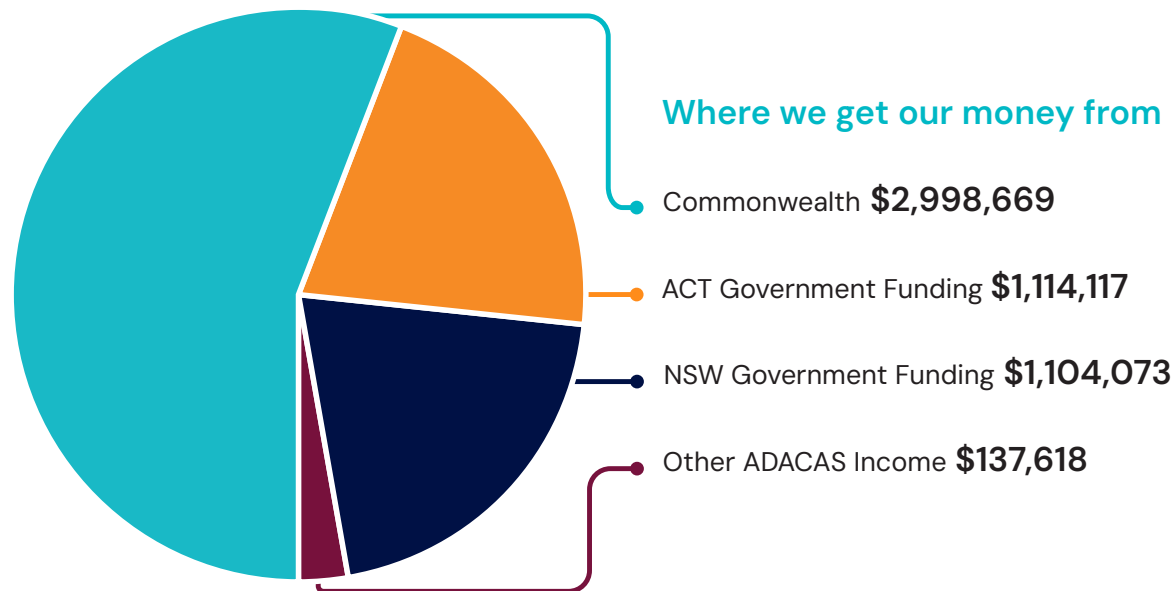
## What we spent our money on

Staff salaries and benefits	<b>\$4,247,661</b>
Depreciation	<b>\$122,001</b>
Administrative expenses	<b>\$641,734</b>



ADACAS continues to remain in a strong financial position, with a surplus of \$192,486 compared to \$439,234 last financial year. There has been some growth in government funding, in particular for the work we are doing in NSW and the work we provide to Older people. The focus for the last year has continued to be on our staff, their professional development and wellbeing. We have remained committed on our journey of data maturity and integrity. This report is our first iteration of highlighting the impact and outcomes that we are achieving.

Staff salaries and benefits have increased alongside the increase of 5000 advocacy hours compared to last financial year. Whilst we have recruited for more disability and mental health advocates, we still have significant demand in the ACT and NSW. The Older persons team has also grown with a number of new roles joining the team to meet the specific needs of the community. With this growth we have demonstrated our financial stewardship in responsibly managing our resources and risks.





## Governance and Acknowledgements



# Our Board

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Helen McDevitt (Chairperson)

Andrew Cameron (Treasurer)

Dr Andrew Mathieson (Board Member)

Greg Mahoney (Board Member – resigned 12/12/23)

Christine Bruce (Board Member)

Dr Raechel Johns (Board Member)

Giang Tan (Board Member)

Vaughn Melano (Board Member – appointed 12/12/23)

Chris Collett (Board Member – appointed 12/12/23)

Wendy Prowse (CEO)

Carolyn Murphy (Company Secretary)



# Acknowledgements

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**The Commonwealth and ACT Governments** have supported us for thirty-one years.

**The NSW Government** supports our services across regional and South Coast NSW.

**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, allowing ADACAS to provide advocacy for older people.

**The Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA)** – our membership enables us to represent our clients' voices on national advocacy and the ongoing challenge of improving rights and services for people living with disability.

**Proximity Advisory Services**, who have been generous in their expert pro bono legal work with the Board.

**Justice Connect** provides valuable guidance and assistance.

**Capital Chemist** for their kind donations to co-brand tote bags to promote our services to Older Canberrans.

**Hands Across Canberra** for their support to ADACAS and the wider community through their Canberra Day Appeal.

**Vincents** has provided efficient and professional service through their auditing services over the years and by providing support and assistance to our Team.

**Employ for Ability** for their support with the Employer Confidence Program.

**OPC IT** has been instrumental in supporting us in providing continuity of service for our clients and prompt assistance with staff IT support.

**Exhale Consulting** for their guidance and support in developing our One ADACAS initiative and professional development provided to the entire Team through facilitated workshops

**DCA Migration** again, for their assistance in migrating legacy client data into Salesforce.

**SalesFix** for their ongoing consultative work in building and developing the Salesforce infrastructure.

A special thank you is reserved for our cultural mentor, **Deborah Eades**, who provides ongoing guidance, wisdom, and knowledge as we implement our first Reconciliation Action Plan.

**To our many community partners**, the ongoing collaboration and camaraderie we share are instrumental to achieving significant positive change. Special thanks to:

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

Thank you to all the organisations and individuals who have worked with us across 2023–2024. We look forward to seeing what we can achieve together over the coming years.







**ADACAS**  
Advocacy

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