



STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2027

Regional
Disability
Advocacy
Service

RDAS

Strategic Plan 2024-2027

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Introduction

This document presents the strategic plan (“The Plan”) of Regional Disability Advocacy Service (RDAS) for the period 2024-2027.

The Plan has been developed following a period of reorganisation and rejuvenation, with the appointment of a new Executive Officer in mid-2022.

The past two years have seen a comprehensive review of financial and operational procedures to enhance efficiency, transparency and optimise performance across all levels, a review of governance and Board composition, extensive stakeholder engagement and a program of cultural renewal that continues to evolve.

This renewal, coupled with a rapidly changing external environment, created a need for a revision of the organisation's strategic priorities as it enters a new phase.

The proposed reforms to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and need for increased advocacy funding to meet demand will bring both opportunities and challenges. This strategic plan emphasises the importance of being informed, prepared and ‘having the house in order’ so RDAS can be more agile in decision-making and proactive in pursuing opportunities.

By enhancing the organisation’s foundations through capacity building, staying informed through policy monitoring and community engagement, increasing opportunities through partnerships, RDAS will be ready to adapt, survive and thrive in the evolving landscape.

The RDAS Strategic Plan 2024-2027 sets a clear path for navigating the upcoming changes with resilience and foresight, ensuring that RDAS remains a strong, responsive, and an effective provider of advocacy services in our communities.

RDAS remains steadfast in its commitment to strengthen its capacity to support People with Disabilities, their families and carers, across our region, and this strategic plan has been developed following extensive consultation with community, partners, and stakeholders in advocacy and disability.

We look forward to working with all our stakeholders to achieve our vision and make a lasting impact in the lives of those we serve.

Approach

The Plan aims to provide a clear and shared direction for RDAS for the next three years, based on its vision, mission, values, and purpose.

The Plan is the result of a collaborative and consultative process that involved RDAS staff, board, advocacy partners, disability service providers and other key stakeholders. The Plan also reflects the current and emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities in the disability advocacy sector and the broader environment in which RDAS operates.

The Plan will be reviewed and monitored regularly by the RDAS Board and management team, with input from staff, community, and external stakeholders.

The Plan will be communicated and promoted to all RDAS stakeholders and will inform the operational planning and budgeting of the organisation.

RDAS Vision

Through inclusive advocacy, information, and coordination for and with people with disability and their families, maintain and grow our reputation for value based accessible service delivery across an increased geographical area.

RDAS Mission

To empower, inform and advocate for people with disability so they can live the life they choose.

We will advocate and communicate about community inclusion and the contributions that people with disability can make to society.



RDAS Values

- **Service:** always remembering we exist to serve. Working in the best interest of people with disability is our foremost obligation
- **Respect:** a deep respect for our clients, staff, colleagues, business partners and the environment
- **Integrity:** alignment of our values for human rights and in the way we serve consumers
- **Excellence:** pursuit of excellence in all our activities and operations
- **Innovation:** a commitment to taking a thoughtful and creative approach to service delivery, taking account of the latest developments in technology, research and new knowledge
- **Client confidentiality:** respect for the privacy of our clients, maintaining confidentiality in all dealings
- **Ethics:** undertaking all activities in an open, honest and ethical manner, maintaining the highest professional integrity
- **Transparency:** ensuring that our services are provided open and transparently

RDAS Today

RDAS Ltd was established as an organisation in 2017 following the merger of the Disability Advocacy and Information Service Inc (DAIS) based in Wodonga, and Disability Advocacy Network Inc (DAN) based in Wagga Wagga.

As stated in the RDAS Constitution, RDAS exists to:

- Advocate for the rights of people with disabilities as defined under the Disability Discrimination Act and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- Provide information and support and promote positive change in the lives of people with a disability and their carers
- Promote and protect rights of people with a disability by systemically advocating to influence all levels of Government and service providers
- Empower individuals to advocate for themselves
- Resource and support disability-related groups and initiatives
- Promote inclusion of people with disability as valued and active members of their community

Under the RDAS Ltd umbrella, there are two separate business arms:

(1) Regional Disability Advocacy Services (RDAS)

(2) Plan & Connect

RDAS is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services and the Department of Families, Fairness & Housing (VIC) to provide independent and free advocacy services to people with disability to ensure their equality of rights and increased integration into the community. Our skilled advocates support hundreds of people each year to resolve issues and improve their quality of life.

Support can include attending meetings, court appearances, writing letters, navigating the NDIS or appealing decisions, but we also deliver community education sessions, teach self-advocacy skills and address systemic issues.

With offices in Wodonga, Wangaratta, Griffith & Wagga Wagga, we are contracted to support residents across 34 local government areas spanning northeast Victoria and southern New South Wales.



Plan & Connect is a registered NDIS support coordination and plan management business but does not provide any direct NDIS services. This means we source services to match the unique requirements and expectations of our participants and their families.

For the purposes of The Plan, "RDAS" represents both arms of the organisation. Where an initiative is specific to one arm of the organisation, this has been explicitly noted.

The operating environment

There is considerable reform taking shape in the disability sector over the next five years, following completion of the Disability Royal Commission and the NDIS review.

Proposed reforms to the NDIS are expected to consolidate the functions of Support Coordinator and Local Area Coordinators (LAC's) into a new Navigator function, which will assist individuals, their families and carers to navigate the NDIS, understand, find and use funded services, as well as mainstream foundational supports. These changes, if implemented as stated, will have a significant impact on the Plan & Connect business, as Support Coordination as we know it today is not expected to exist.

The function of the Navigator is yet to be fully defined; however, it is likely that opportunities will be created for agencies to tender for the function.

There are also significant changes proposed for Plan Management, which is the second service offered by Plan & Connect. Plan Management will cease to exist when a 'multi-channel digital payments system' enables all plan providers to be paid directly, thus removing the 'middleman' service.

Both these changes are slated to take effect in 2027-28.

Outcomes of the Disability Royal Commission were very supportive of the role and value of independent advocacy. It was recognised that demand for advocacy support is two-times above capacity in the current system nationally, and specific recommendations were made to increase funding.

With current Federal Government contracts expiring in mid-2025, Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA) have suggested that any funding reforms may align with the re-tendering of contracts.

Compounding these external challenges are internal operational challenges including low levels of available cash flow, which can hinder the ability of the organisation to move swiftly with innovative solutions; key-person risk, particularly relevant to the Executive Officer and Management team; and the board's limited understanding of this reform environment, making it difficult to prepare for and respond to impending changes effectively.

It will also be critical to understand the financial implications of a possible closure of plan management and support coordination as the funding for these services ceases.

Despite these challenges, there are numerous opportunities that RDAS can leverage to enhance its sustainability and impact in this strategic period. Leveraging its Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status and exploring philanthropic funding sources can provide new revenue streams.

Exploring partnerships for service delivery, new service development leveraging fee-for-service models, and potentially diversifying away from disability advocacy alone to other forms of advocacy where existing models and processes can be replicated.

This environment of reform also presents a potential opportunity to consider tendering for the NDIS Navigator function, and for exploring what partnerships would enable RDAS to be successful in this quest.

Focusing on human rights advocacy and enhancing visibility on systemic issues will strengthen RDAS's position as a leading advocacy organisation. Establishing a client advisory committee for Advocacy and a participant advisory committee for Plan &

Connect, and improving the Board's understanding of NDIS reforms, will enhance governance and ensure better preparedness for future changes. Moreover, developing a robust succession plan and risk management framework can address internal vulnerabilities and build organisational resilience.

Raising awareness of RDAS's services through targeted engagement and building a network of brand ambassadors can improve the organisation's awareness and reputation. Sourcing funds for a community engagement officer could also facilitate more opportunities and development of stronger community ties.

In conclusion, RDAS operates in a dynamic and challenging external environment marked by funding instability, significant NDIS reforms, and operational constraints. However, by strategically addressing these challenges and leveraging available opportunities, RDAS can strengthen its position, enhance its advocacy impact, and ensure sustainable growth in the evolving landscape of disability services and advocacy.

What is working well

- 1. RDAS staff and their passion for what they do** – staff they go above and beyond in supporting people, they always put the person with a disability first, and respect that a person has autonomy over their own life.
- 2. New leadership** – with the appointment of a new Executive Officer in mid-2022, RDAS has undergone a period of transition and rejuvenation, resulting in the appointment of a new management team structure, and an improving workplace culture.
- 3. A rights-based approach to Advocacy** – A rights-based approach to advocacy that emphasizes that independent advocacy is a critical and valued element of disability support, ensuring that individuals with disabilities have their voices heard and their rights protected.
- 4. Improved process and procedures** – including automated financial reports for the Board, improved workflow management processes, and regular monitoring and management of client and participant engagement across the organisation.
- 5. RDAS awareness and reputation** – as measured by strong word of mouth referrals, low number of complaints, a renewed focus on targeted stakeholder engagement, and a respect and legitimacy accorded generally to Disability Advocacy organisations and the work they do.

What is not working well

1. Plan & Connect – while the service is making small margins, it is not producing the returns that were envisaged, and intended as an alternative source of income to traditional Advocacy funding. The likelihood for NDIS reforms impacting services provided by Plan & Connect is very high.

2. Board NDIS knowledge – an understanding of the NDIS and NDIS reforms is not consistent across the Board, and this will be a challenge for decision making around future opportunities with the impending NDIS reforms.

3. The compliance burden – A very large number of compliance obligations and associated costs exist, but funding does not support the employment of dedicated experienced resources to manage this. Responsibility therefore falls to the management team with support of the board to manage in addition to day to day obligations.



4. Reforms to the way advocates can navigate the NDIS – the reforms have changed how much impact advocates have; they can no longer do a direct NDIS access request, it has to go through a Local Area Coordinator (LAC), who create a community connection plan and may then submit a NDIS request. This has caused Advocacy timelines to blow out and cases remain open indefinitely.

What does our success look like?

- We will increase our financial sustainability by diversifying sources of income and lessening our reliance on advocacy funding.
- We will maintain advocacy as our core purpose and uphold our focus on delivering quality service within a human rights framework.
- We will be informed of changes that impact us and be prepared to make decisions about our future.
- We will respond to opportunities in a timely and proactive manner.
- We will be an employer of choice in our region.
- We will grow awareness of RDAS and maintain a strong reputation for supporting people with disability in our community.

Strategic Priorities

Four strategic priorities have been identified for this strategic period, emphasising stability in preparation for the proposed reforms within the disability sector and in particular to the NDIS.

The strategic priorities provide a clear and focused direction for the organisation and serve as a guide for decision-making.

Key initiatives within each of the priority areas are also outlined, which will enable RDAS to align resources and effort.

A framework for measuring success is defined, enabling RDAS to adapt and respond to challenges and opportunities in a timely and structured manner.

- 1. Quality Services and a commitment to upholding the human rights of People with Disability**
- 2. A financial strategy that is focused on income diversification**
- 3. A strong and skilled workforce and a positive workplace culture.**
- 4. A steady and informed focus, in a rapidly changing environment**

**A PROGRESSIVE
FINANCIAL
STRATEGY WITH
AN EMPHASIS ON
DIVERSIFICATION.**

**A STRONG AND
SKILLED
WORKFORCE
AND A POSITIVE
WORKPLACE
CULTURE**



**QUALITY
SERVICES AND A
COMMITMENT TO
UPHOLDING THE
HUMAN RIGHTS
OF PEOPLE WITH
A DISABILITY**

**A STEADY AND
INFORMED FOCUS
IN A RAPIDLY
CHANGING
ENVIRONMENT**

Priority 1 - Quality services and a commitment to upholding the human rights of People with Disability



Supporting and empowering individuals with disability to ensure their human rights are recognised, respected and upheld, is our top priority. We assist individuals to make informed decisions about their lives and empower individuals to advocate for themselves.

We commit to delivering high quality services and to maintaining a transparent separation between advocacy and service delivery. We ensure that our clients and participants are at the forefront of all planning and service delivery choices.

Our unwavering commitment to advocacy and service excellence encourages our clients to recommend our services to others.

	Strategy	Initiatives
1.1	Lived experience of disability informs service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish client and participant advisory groups to inform service design, delivery and improvement Lived experience of disability to remain an integral criterion across board composition.
1.2	A transparent separation of services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain the formal structures that are in place to uphold a transparent separation of services between Advocacy and Plan & Connect, to avoid conflicts of interest
1.3	Harness consumer feedback and complaints to improve service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Routinely collect feedback from customers, their families and carers, and ensure these mechanisms are accessible to all Complaints are monitored and responded to, according to the complaints procedure. The complaints procedure is understood by all staff. Feedback and complaints inform the continuous improvement process, to drive a better client/ participant experience.
1.4	Focus on demand management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waitlists remain at low levels for both Advocacy and Plan & Connect Proactive marketing of services is activated when services have capacity to deliver.
1.5	Stakeholder relationship management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish and maintain referral pathways and networks with disability service providers, organisations, and agencies that support people with disability. Be informed by and participate in Advocacy networks such as DANA, to ensure RDAS is at the forefront of sector best practice and reforms.
1.6	Systemic Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance the influence and representation of People with Disabilities via systemic advocacy efforts.

How will we know we're succeeding?

- ✓ A Client Advisory Group and a Participant Advisory Group are established
- ✓ Clients and Participants are reporting a high level of customer satisfaction with services and the achievement of their agreed advocacy action plans or life goals
- ✓ A Net Promoter Score measure established and reported
- ✓ Clear procedures are in place for managing conflict of interest
- ✓ A continuous improvement process is in place to embed consumer feedback
- ✓ Strong and reputable relationships with disability services providers, advocacy bodies and funding agencies.

Priority 2 - A progressive financial strategy with an emphasis on diversification

A focus on income diversification is essential to provide increased cash flow to RDAS, which in-turn will allow greater ability to innovate and respond proactively to opportunities that are likely to come from the proposed NDIS reforms.

While the medium-term future of Plan & Connect is uncertain, continued growth of the service in this strategic period, across existing markets, is intended to maximise available income and provide continued services to clients amidst uncertainty of the NDIS reforms.

	Strategy	Initiatives
2.1	Leverage Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore grant applications to philanthropic funds that support disability organisations and initiatives. ▪ Increase reach of RDAS inclusion to existing Workplace Giving programs ▪ Explore other fundraising initiatives including events, campaigns, bequests, social enterprise, digital strategy etc.
2.2	Build strategic partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partnerships and sub-contracts with national advocacy bodies, to co-design and co-deliver programs into our geographies ▪ Develop strong partnerships that support any potential reorganisation of advocacy funding or changes to geographic boundaries
2.3	Develop a suite of fee for service offerings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a fee-for-service structure to delivery training / diversity and inclusion / Disability Action Plan development for local government and businesses.
2.4	Considered investment in Plan & Connect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure Plan & Connect services are fully utilised, and margins are being maintained, for the duration of its inclusion in the NDIS

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Grow services within current footprint in a sustainable manner and leverage opportunities where other providers are exiting the market.
2.5	Targeted marketing and community engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase utilisation of Plan & Connect services through targeted marketing campaigns to increase awareness of services ▪ Targeted community engagement to increase awareness of advocacy services among people with disability and service providers ▪ Build a network of brand ambassadors to improve awareness of the organisation through outreach. ▪ Undertake ongoing community engagement to facilitate more connections, increased awareness of services and develop stronger community ties.

How will we know we're succeeding?

- ✓ Maintain federal advocacy funding at current or higher level
- ✓ Advocacy funding as a percentage of total revenue is declining
- ✓ Increased number of revenue streams
- ✓ Increased available cash flow
- ✓ Plan & Connect – low levels of capacity available; productivity and targets achieved and reported
- ✓ People know who we are - our brands are recognised and well regarded

Priority 3 - A strong and skilled workforce and a positive workplace culture

RDAS staff are the heart of the organisation; they are skilled, passionate, and fierce advocates for People with Disability. Creating a positive workplace culture that is resilient in the face of change, while also respecting the separation of services, is crucial. A positive workplace culture enhances job satisfaction, boosts morale, and promotes collaboration.

By investing in the professional development of our staff, by creating a supportive and adaptive work environment and by investing in open and two-way communication as a standard, RDAS will create a workplace culture where employees feel valued, respected, and motivated.

Strategy		Initiatives
3.1	Staff training and professional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Training and development opportunities are offered to all staff, to encourage continued learning ▪ Collaboration with DANA and other stakeholders to professionalise disability advocacy training and Support Coordination to further enhance RDAS's capacity to deliver high-quality services.
3.2	Building culture and maintaining separation of services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Uphold policy and procedures that ensure transparency, clear delineation of services between Advocacy and Plan & Connect ▪ Provide staff guidance and training on separation, valuing personal and professional integrity and consumer rights ▪ Continue to operate as one staff group with a shared vision and purpose.
3.3	Shared values and sense of purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create opportunities for organisation-wide gatherings that enable a shared experience and sense of purpose ▪ Review of the organisation's values; creating opportunity for all staff in the development of the values; imbedding of the values into every position and geographical location.
3.4	Policy & Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop and maintain a quality assurance system that ensures compliance with relevant standards, policies, and procedures. ▪ Review of the HR Manual and related policies and procedures
3.5	Staff engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Engage staff in bi-annual staff engagement surveys ▪ An effective internal communications strategy from the Board and Management, to ensure staff are informed of sector reforms and their impact

How will we know we're succeeding?

- ✓ Staff surveys are completed by 80 percent of staff
- ✓ Staff report a high level of overall satisfaction in their work and workplace
- ✓ High staff retention
- ✓ Submission for Employer of Choice Award
- ✓ Number of staff using training budget / undertake professional development activities and report increased confidence and competence in their roles
- ✓ Staff understand impending reforms and their impact
- ✓ Policies and procedure governance is up to date
- ✓ All staff know the organisational values and feel a shared sense of purpose

Priority 4 - A steady and informed focus, in a rapidly changing environment

With impending reforms to the NDIS there is a need for RDAS to be agile and flexible in adapting to changes in the environment. In order to pivot and take advantage of opportunities, as well as prepare for the likely challenges to service delivery, RDAS Board and Management need to be well-informed of the reform agenda.

With an eye to the future, RDAS needs to be remain steady.

RDAS needs to be strategic in building stakeholder relationships, have a solid understanding of the organisation's appetite for risk in decision making, and be expert in leading change that will impact staff, consumers and their communities.

	Strategy	Initiatives
4.1	Knowledgeable about reforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Board and Management are up to date with sector reforms and can use this knowledge to inform decision making ▪ RDAS has a strong relationship with Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA) and can influence systemic change and policy reform to improve the lives of People with Disabilities.
4.2	A robust governance framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Board have strengthened risk mitigation and compliance activities ▪ The Board have developed a risk appetite statement ▪ The Board apply a risk-based approach to assess and evaluate new growth opportunities ▪ The Board are prepared for any Constitutional reform that is required for RDAS as they navigate sector reforms
4.3	Discussion of opportunities as they evolve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Board have explored a broader definition of Advocacy (beyond disability) and have assessed opportunities that may arise with NDIS Navigator roles, including impact and benefit ▪ The Board understand the impact of changes to Plan & Connect and have endorsed a strategy for transition of services
4.4	Transition / succession planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Board have a succession plan in place for the Executive Officer role and key management positions

How will we know we're succeeding?

- ✓ The Board have an adequate level of understanding of NDIS and advocacy reforms
- ✓ There is a robust governance structure in place to assess and evaluate new opportunities

- ✓ Board understands its appetite for risk and is informed to make decisions about the future of RDAS
- ✓ The Board is prepared for succession of key roles within the organisation
- ✓ The Board is prepared for the transition of Plan & Connect and have strategies to mitigate the impact to staff, consumer, their families and carers.

RDAS strategy review process

The strategy review process tool is intended for the Board and Management team to use bi-annually in a dynamic and evolving environment.

The process will assist RDAS to ensure their strategies remain relevant and effective, and that new opportunities and threats are being assessed in a timely manner.

1. Evaluate performance

- Data collection: Gather relevant data on key performance indicators (KPIs) and metrics.
- Feedback gathering: Collect insights and feedback from team members and stakeholders.
- Analysis: Compare actual performance against strategic goals and objectives.

2. Identify and address gaps

- Gap analysis: Identify any discrepancies between planned and actual performance.
- Challenges and opportunities: Recognise any challenges encountered and new opportunities that may have arisen.
- Adjustments: Develop and implement necessary adjustments to strategies and actions.

3. Communicate and document

- Communication: Inform stakeholders about performance, challenges, adjustments, and updated plans.
- Documentation: Maintain a record of the review process, findings, adjustments made, and the updated plan for future reference and continuous improvement.

