

# ACD 2021

Year in review



Association for  
Children with a  
Disability

## A message from the President

As a first-time Board President, and as a young person with disability, it has been incredibly rewarding to lead ACD through the past 12 months.

In what was a challenging year for many organisations, our leadership team responded swiftly to position ACD as a vital and effective advocacy voice for the safety of children with disability and their education rights during COVID.

ACD rose to the challenge, engaging with over 10,000 families. We saw a 40% increase in calls to our Support Line,

delivered over 120 online workshops and expanded our communications channels.

This year we were delighted to welcome two new members to the ACD Board, Dr Ronelle Hutchinson and Eleanore Fritze. Ronelle brings policy expertise in the areas of health and education, and Eleanore is a mental health and disability rights lawyer and advocate.

We also farewelled outgoing Board members Erica Hussien and Matt Hilakari and thank them for their service.

I would like to thank the Board for their support this year, and also thank ACD's leadership and staff team whose hard work and dedication made a difference to families.



**Matthew Holland**  
President

## A message from the CEO

This past year has been extremely difficult for Victorian families. With remote learning and lockdowns due to COVID, speaking up for children with disability and their families directly to government has never been more important.

By joining with other voices and networks, we were able to make an impact on shaping effective outcomes for children and families during COVID.

After sustained advocacy at the state level, we were pleased to see students with disability who could not learn from home able to attend school.

2021 saw ACD reach more families than ever before.

We thank the Victorian Government for additional funding that allowed us to meet the increased demand for our services.

We were also delighted to receive philanthropic support from Perpetual Trustees that helped us to expand the Support Line and funding from Equity Trustees to support our volunteer Community Champion program.

This year funding from the Australian Government Information Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) enabled us to provide over the phone self-advocacy support to families and deliver two new series of workshops, Early Years and Teens and Beyond.

My thanks to the ACD team for delivering our Support Line, workshops and resources to families across Victoria in such a challenging year.

Thanks also to the many families who shared their experiences with us. It is your voice and aspirations for your children that underpin all our work.



**Karen Dimmock**  
CEO



# Priority area 1: Safety of children

ACD provided daily information that helped keep children with disability and their families safe during COVID

## Support for families

In a year of COVID restrictions, lockdowns and remote learning, ACD was quick to respond to the increased risk due to reduced disability supports and prolonged learning from home.

We provided daily information to families alongside strong advocacy to influence the government's COVID response, and ensure the safety of children and families.

Through ACD's digital channels more than 10,000 families received information about support during restrictions, family violence support, financial assistance, how to access a child's NDIS Plan for additional support, and keeping children safe at home.

Families reported that ACD was their preferred source of relevant and practical COVID updates and widely shared our information.



Our Facebook Live Q&A sessions, video messages and Support Line kept us connected to the direct experiences of families. This allowed us to be highly responsive in advocating on their behalf. We clarified what was possible under care and compassionate grounds to support children with complex behaviour and prevent harm to themselves or their families.

ACD also provided Easy English information and stories to share on COVID testing and vaccinations, restrictions, mask wearing and returning to school. We also promoted translated information for diverse communities.

## Speaking up

Recognising the strength of combined voices and networks, ACD collaborated with other organisations to keep children with disability safe during COVID.

We worked closely with Amaze, YDAS, VCOSS, Commissioner for Children and Young People, Centre for Community Child Health and the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare.

ACD also represented children with disability and their families as part of the COVID-19 Disability Ministerial Task Force.



**1,482**

callers to the Support Line  
40% increase

**95%**

of families more confident  
speaking up for their child

**90%**

of families reported an  
improvement in their  
child's situation

# Priority area 2: NDIS

ACD supported families across Victoria to navigate the NDIS

## Support for families

ACD supported more than 1,000 Victorian families to navigate the NDIS and speak up for their child.

We assisted families through our Support Line and more than 40 workshops including Early Years and Prepare for your Child's NDIS Plan Review.

We developed four new fact sheets about the NDIS, covering behaviour support, setting goals, and self-managing your child's NDIS Plan.

ACD played an important role in building the knowledge and capacity of child and family services to help at-risk families access the NDIS and implement Plans.

In partnership with the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare we delivered professional development to more than 800 child and family workers.



## Independent assessments

ACD joined disability advocates across Australia in a successful campaign to stop independent assessments. Working strategically with other disability organisations, we highlighted the significant risks of independent assessments on children with disability. Our advocacy included collaborating with ACD Tasmania in a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS, and meeting with the Minister for the NDIS.

In response to the NDIA consultation on the Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) Reset, we recommended continued family-centred and multi-disciplinary approaches to NDIS supports for children and families.

## Parental responsibility

ACD commissioned evidence-based research from the Melbourne Law School NDIS and Disability Benefits Clinic on the use of parental responsibility by the NDIS.

The report Parental Responsibility under the National Disability Insurance Scheme addressed the definition of parental responsibility and how parents can ensure they receive adequate supports for their child. It drew on NDIS legislation, case law and family experiences to explore this issue.

Our Support Line was able to inform families of the evidence required to prove that the care they provide goes beyond parental responsibility. This helped to reduce the escalation of cases through formal appeal processes and minimise further stress to parents.

120

workshops delivered  
19% increase

95%

of families found  
the information easy  
to understand

95%

of workshop attendees  
would recommend ACD

# Priority area 3: Education

ACD successfully spoke up for students with disability during COVID

## Access to education

In partnership with Amaze, ACD advocated strongly for students with disability during COVID. We secured the option for students who could not learn from home to be able to attend school. This was a lifeline for many students with disability and their families.

We achieved this outcome through meetings with the Deputy Premier, Minister for Education, and with the Parliamentary Secretary for Schools. We also met regularly with DET and made a joint presentation to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. The impact of learning from home on students with disability and their families was acknowledged by the Victorian Premier at a number of press conferences.

ACD also welcomed the Victorian Government announcement of a \$1.6 billion Disability Inclusion investment. This introduces recommendations that ACD has supported over many years.



These include a strengths-based approach to planning for students with disability and a Diverse Learners Hub to build schools' capacity to support the learning needs of students with disability.

## Support for families

ACD provided support to more than 1,100 families, building their knowledge, skills and confidence to speak up for their child at school.

During lockdowns our Support Line responded to a surge in calls about the lack of reasonable adjustments for learning from home, and schools denying attendance to students who could not learn from home. In the return to school we supported many families whose children had been placed on restricted hours.

To support families to better advocate for their child at school, ACD successfully delivered more than 40 online workshops. Topics included a targeted workshop series for families with children starting Prep, how to prepare for Student Support Group meetings, and how Individual Education Plans and Behaviour Support Plans can set students up for success.

ACD developed new fact sheets on key topics that underpin the success of students with disability at school. These included reasonable adjustments, behaviour support, professional development for educators and funding for students with disability.

Our Rock Solid resource for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families was updated into a series of online fact sheets to help strengthen family-school partnerships so that children with disability can thrive at school.

6,886

Facebook followers  
60% increase

8,920

online newsletter subscribers  
36% increase

54,624

website visitors  
5% increase

# Priority area 4: Support for families

ACD took every opportunity to promote inclusive communities

## Local Government Action Plan

In the lead-up to the 2020 Victorian local government elections, ACD launched our Local Government Action Plan. The Plan mapped out how services and communities can become more inclusive of children with disability and families. It focused on excellence in inclusive early childhood education, accessible public spaces and employment opportunities.

## Community partnerships

For the fourth year in a row, ACD partnered with Zoos Victoria to host Dream Day for children with disability and their families. This much-loved event showcases the best of inclusive family fun and entertainment.

## Support for families

We introduced our new Teens and Beyond workshops. This series connects parents of teens with disability and explores supporting teens with future planning, health and wellbeing, and moving towards greater independence.

Informed by consultation with YDAS and young people with disability, the program covers topics such as dignity of risk and supported decision-making. Families who participated in these workshops reported feeling more confident and positive about their teenager's future.

## Strengthening Parent Support Coordinators

ACD convenes the network of Strengthening Parent Support Coordinators. The Coordinators are located across Victoria and connect families to peer support, parenting programs and services in their local area.

In the year ahead ACD will also convene the Community of Practice for family services specialist disability practitioners. The practitioners will build the capacity of child and family services to assist vulnerable children and parents with disability to access disability supports and participate effectively in the NDIS.

## Disability and age of children supported

8%

physical  
disability

8%

intellectual  
disability

61%

autism

67%

aged 5-14 years

## Families supported

2%

Aboriginal and Torres  
Strait Islander

14%

from regional Victoria

17%

culturally and  
linguistically diverse

# Speaking up for children

ACD spoke up for children with disability and their families

## Achievements

ACD successfully advocated for students with disability to attend school if they could not learn from home during COVID.

We also played an active role in the successful campaign to stop NDIS independent assessments.

This was achieved by working collaboratively with Amaze, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare and VCOSS.

## Submissions

- Review of the Disability Standards for Education
- Supporting young children and families to reach their potential, NDIA ECEI Reset
- Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS: Specific issues for children and independent assessments
- State Disability Plan
- Not Just 5 Days: Impact of the snap lockdown on children with disability and their families

A full list of ACD submissions is available at [www.acd.org.au/about-us/advocacy/](http://www.acd.org.au/about-us/advocacy/)

## Presentations and roundtables

- Presentation to Public Accounts and Estimate Committee (PAEC) - Inquiry into the Victorian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic
- Presentation to Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS - independent assessments
- Roundtable with Amaze and the Parliamentary Secretary for Schools on remote and flexible learning
- Roundtable with the Minister for the NDIS

## Key meetings

- Deputy Premier and Minister for Education
- Minister for Disability
- Parliamentary Secretary for Schools
- Commissioner for Children and Young People
- Victorian Disability Worker Commissioner
- Independent Office for School Dispute Resolution

## Campaigns

- Local Government Action Plan
- Every Australian Counts Joint Statement against independent assessments

## Advisory Groups

- Minister for Disability COVID Taskforce
- Roadmap to Reform Ministerial Advisory Group – Implementation Committee
- Disability Inclusion Advisory Group (DET)
- Disability Act Review Advisory Group

## Consultations

- Mental health support in secondary schools
- Outside School Hours Care
- Tutors in schools

## Research participation

- Adolescent use of violence in the home
- Early Childhood inclusion
- Parental Responsibility





## About ACD

Our vision is for children with disability and their families to have the same rights and opportunities as other children and families. We are a not-for-profit organisation led by and for families of children with disability.

### Our work

ACD supports families with children with disability aged 0-18 years.

- We **empower** families with knowledge, skills and confidence to achieve the best for their children
- We **advocate** for children with disability and their families
- We **educate** service providers, professionals and the community to be inclusive of children with disability and to work in partnership with families
- We **influence** government and public policy to advance the rights of children with disability and their families

### Our services

For families and professionals we offer:

- Support Line
- Workshops
- Information and resources

Information about the ACD Board is available at [www.acd.org.au](http://www.acd.org.au)

Our financial report is available at [www.acnc.gov.au](http://www.acnc.gov.au)



Association for  
Children with a  
Disability