



Annual Report 2022



Association for
Children with a
Disability

President's message



My name's Catherine Devine and I'm delighted to have been elected President of ACD.

I became involved with ACD through my second child who was born with a range of disabilities. This meant I discovered the world of early intervention, peer support, and organisations like ACD which has been advocating for children like mine for over 40 years.

I have a background in marketing and communications and I am mum to three primary school-aged boys.

This year ACD strengthened its financial position, continued to be a respected voice for children with disability to government, and reached more families than ever before.

These achievements are the result of many people. Thank you to:

- Matthew Holland and Georgina Frost, both former ACD Presidents, who have generously shared their skills and knowledge with me.
- The ACD Board members who volunteered their time and expertise. This year we welcomed Craig Anderson, Mikel Dean and Anita McKenzie. All three are parents of children with disability and bring skills in risk management, financial oversight and stakeholder engagement. It is wonderful to have them on our board.
- The ACD staff team, which grew this year, and whose passion for advocating for children with disability and their families is obvious.
- An incredible group of volunteer Community Champions, who are all parents of children with disability. They have helped speak up for children and families, and have actively promoted ACD's services in their communities.
- Our funders, including the Victorian Government, Australian Government and philanthropic supporter Equity Trustees.

With the support of all these people and funders, I'm looking forward to continuing the great work of ACD and ensuring more families get the advocacy support they need.

Highlights for 2022



15,000

Victorian families supported by ACD



99%

Families who said the information ACD provided was easy to understand



89%

Families who gained a better understanding of their child's rights after accessing our services



98%

Workshop attendees who said they would recommend them to others

Speaking up for children

We heard directly about the issues facing children with disability and their families, and we took every opportunity to speak up for them.



Achievements

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

Advocated for priority access and a range of support to assist children with disability to be vaccinated.

Raised awareness of the increase in children's NDIS plans being cut and families appealing to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT).

Highlighted the increase in students with disability being informally excluded from kindergartens and schools.

Key meetings and roundtables:

- Roundtable with then Shadow Minister for the NDIS Bill Shorten MP
- Minister for Education
- Minister for Disability
- Eight state and federal MPs
- Parliamentary Secretary for Schools
- Commissioner for Children and Young People
- Victorian Disability Worker Commissioner
- Independent Office for School Dispute Resolution

Participated in advisory groups:

- Minister for Disability COVID Taskforce
- Roadmap to Reform Ministerial Advisory Group - Implementation Committee
- Disability Inclusion Advisory Group
- Disability Act Review Advisory Group
- Victorian Community Advisory Council NDIS
- Healthy Trajectories Advisory Committee

Contributed to consultations:

- Mental health support in schools
- Outside School Hours Care
- Vaccine access for children with disability
- Early Parenting Centre expansions
- Raising Children Network
- Australian Inclusion Support Program
- New school orders
- Senior secondary pathway reforms
- Early childhood reforms
- Improving inclusion support in kindergarten
- State Autism Plan

Submissions and reports:

- Our hopes for our children and the NDIS
- Review of the Victorian Disability Act.

A full list of ACD submissions is available at www.acd.org.au/about-us/advocacy/

Priority 1: Safety of children

Increased access to COVID vaccines

ACD Community Champions advised the Victorian Government on more inclusive state vaccination centres and increasing vaccine accessibility.

We hosted a popular Facebook Live Q&A session in partnership with the Royal Children's Hospital and Disability Liaison Officers to answer questions from families about vaccines for 5 to 11-year olds.

Developed targeted information for families, and had individual conversations to increase their confidence during restrictions and get the support their child needed.

Families told us that Disability Liaison Officers, sensory spaces, and vaccination at home made all the difference.

Supported vulnerable families

ACD helped vulnerable families get the advocacy support they needed.

Our Support Line provided secondary consults to more than 253 professionals, enabling vulnerable families to access advocacy services.

We convened the Community of Practice for state-wide family disability specialist practitioners. These professionals built the capacity of child and family services, supporting vulnerable families to access and implement NDIS plans.

Promoted supported decision making

Supported decision making helps people with disability to make decisions about their life and improves their safety.

We helped families learn about supported decision making through our information resources and our popular Teens & Beyond workshops.

In the lead up to the federal election we focused on how families could support their young person to vote for the first time.



1,453

Callers to the Support Line



94%

Callers who felt more confident speaking up for their child after using our service



82%

Callers who reported an improvement in their child's situation with our help

Priority 2: NDIS

Our hopes for our children and the NDIS

ACD successfully highlighted the specific issues for children and families and the NDIS in the lead up to the federal election in May 2022.

Families from across Victoria took part in online consultations, resulting in the report [Our hopes for our children and the NDIS](#). This outlined our recommendations to make the NDIS better for children.

We met and shared our report with then Shadow Minister for the NDIS Bill Shorten MP, NDIA Board members, researchers, and NDIS senior officials. We were also active in the Defend the NDIS campaign run by Every Australian Counts.

Built NDIS knowledge amongst professionals

We heard from thousands of families who were overwhelmed and confused by the NDIS.

Partnering with the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, we provided training on how to help families get the NDIS support they need. This was given to child and family workers, family violence practitioners and child protection workers.

This year we trained more than 595 workers bringing the total over the past three years to more than 2,000.

Helped families advocate

Through our Support Line and workshops we helped over 600 families to better understand the NDIS and advocate for the support their child needed.

Our NDIS related information resources were amongst our most popular. They helped families write Carer Statements, gather good evidence, develop goals for their children, and find services.



"It is clear that ACD has incredible knowledge regarding the NDIS and supporting families. The information and website links are really useful."

- Support Line caller



110

Workshops delivered



1,113

Workshop attendees



98%

Attendees who said the information was easy to understand

Priority 3: Education

Met increased demand

ACD has had a significant increase in demand for its advocacy services. Through the Support Line and workshops, we helped **1,042** families understand their child's rights in education and how to advocate for them.

We saw a rise in cases relating to informal exclusions of students, and worked with families to build their knowledge, skills and confidence to advocate for their child at school and in early childhood education. In response to requests from families, we developed a new workshop called Successful Secondary Years which quickly booked out.

Supported students through COVID

In both 2020 and 2021 during two long periods of COVID restrictions, ACD advocated strongly for students with disability to be able to go to school. In both instances, children with disability who were unable to learn from home were permitted to attend school. We heard from so many families that this was a lifesaver.

Spoke up for students with disability

ACD continued to be a strong voice to government about the rights of students with disability.

We sat on a number of advisory groups and met regularly with the Department of Education and Training.

We provided input into major reforms, including: the Disability Inclusion reform, mental health in schools, pre-prep and senior pathway reforms.



"It was great to hear, that as a parent I can use my voice to work with the school to ensure my child can have access to the same education as his peers."

- Workshop attendee



↑ **31%**

9,025 Facebook followers
(31% increase)



↑ **36%**

12,141 newsletter
subscribers (36% increase)



↑ **60%**

87,734 website visitors
(60% increase)

Priority 4: Support for families

Community Champions

With funding from Equity Trustees, ACD set up the Community Champions volunteer program. 17 volunteers who are parents of children with disability were recruited. They are culturally diverse; live in metropolitan and regional Victoria; and have children with a range of disabilities and ages. They raise awareness of ACD's services in their communities; participate in research, provide feedback on new ACD resources, services and policy submissions; and support our advocacy voice by sharing their experiences with key decision makers.

Inclusive fun

ACD partnered with Zoos Victoria to host the fifth Dream Day at Melbourne Zoo. A record 800 families attended from across Victoria to enjoy a day of inclusive family fun. Over 96% of families surveyed said they felt more confident to attend recreation venues with their children as a result of their positive experience at Dream Day.

ACD also partnered with the Australian F1 Grand Prix to hold the first ever Inclusive Pit Lane Walk for families of children with disability. The pit lane transformed into a low sensory environment; F1 garages were open but machinery use was reduced and car engines were turned off. This allowed the children to get up-close and enjoy the F1 experience.

Local support

For more than a decade ACD has supported the state-wide Strengthening Parent Support Coordinators program.

The 14 coordinators, who are based across metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria, reached thousands of families with children with disability.

The coordinators provided local information, connected families to peer support and helped families find services.



18%
Regional
Victoria

3%
Out-of-
home-care

2%
Aboriginal and
Torres Strait
Islander

21%
Culturally
diverse

Who we supported



77%

Aged 5 to
14 years



53%

Autism



11%

Intellectual
disability



7%

Physical
disability



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.

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

Our work

- 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/about-us/our-people

Our financial report is available at www.acnc.gov.au