



**NATIONAL ADVOCACY  
SERVICE**

**FOR PEOPLE WITH  
DISABILITIES**

Strategic Plan  
**2018-2021**

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## Introduction

The National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS) provides an independent, confidential and free, issues-based representative advocacy service. NAS is funded and supported by the Citizens Information Board (CIB) which has a mandate under the Citizens Information Act 2007 and Comhairle Act 2000 to provide advocacy for people with disabilities.

NAS operates on the principles that people with disabilities:

- Make decisions about their lives.
- Access the supports they need to enable them to live their lives and enjoy meaningful participation in family, work and leisure.
- Are listened to and consulted by their families and those who provide their services.
- Can enjoy the benefits of participation in and contribution to their communities if they so choose.

## People with disabilities – taking a rights-based approach

The Irish Constitution and both the European Convention on Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) guarantee the same fundamental rights to everyone. People with disabilities may enjoy these rights as a principle, but can experience great difficulty in exercising rights such as those of privacy, respect and dignity, the freedom to choose and to have opportunities to fulfil personal aspirations, and the right to realise their potential in their daily lives. People with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to not being able to exercise rights, often because of assumptions that they do not have the capacity to make choices, or through dependence on others for care/support, and isolation from the wider community. In addition, there are many barriers facing people with disabilities in attempting to remedy situations where they are deprived of their rights.

Advocacy can be the key role in enabling people to exercise autonomy and choice, and a measure of this is in HIQA standards, which recognise the right of adults in residential settings to access independent advocacy.

## Our Vision

Our vision for society is one where people with disabilities can exercise their rights – with dignity, autonomy, equality and independence at the core. We recognise the capacity of persons with disabilities to make their own decisions equally with others, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

## Our Mission

The National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS) provides an independent, confidential and free advocacy service that works exclusively for adults with disabilities. Our role is to work with those who may be isolated from their community of choice or mainstream society, may communicate differently and who may have limited informal or natural supports. We act as a catalyst for change through collaboration, capacity building and representation to make the rights of people with disabilities a reality.



## Core Values

NAS has adopted **five core values** which inform its work.

### 1. Independence

NAS works with the person independently of others and free from all conflicts of interest. The advocacy process is led and guided by the person.

### 2. Autonomy

NAS supports the right of the person to self-direction/determination (i.e. to be in control of their own life) and to make informed decisions based on their will and preferences.

### 3. Equality/Citizenship

NAS supports the right of every person to assert and enjoy their human rights, to participate in society as an equal citizen and to fulfil their potential within a life of their own choosing.

### 4. Respect

NAS works with the person in a way which demonstrates respect for the person as an individual and for their privacy, dignity and autonomy. All NAS staff, partners and directors will act in a way that demonstrates respect for the people who use NAS and each other.

### 5. Empowerment

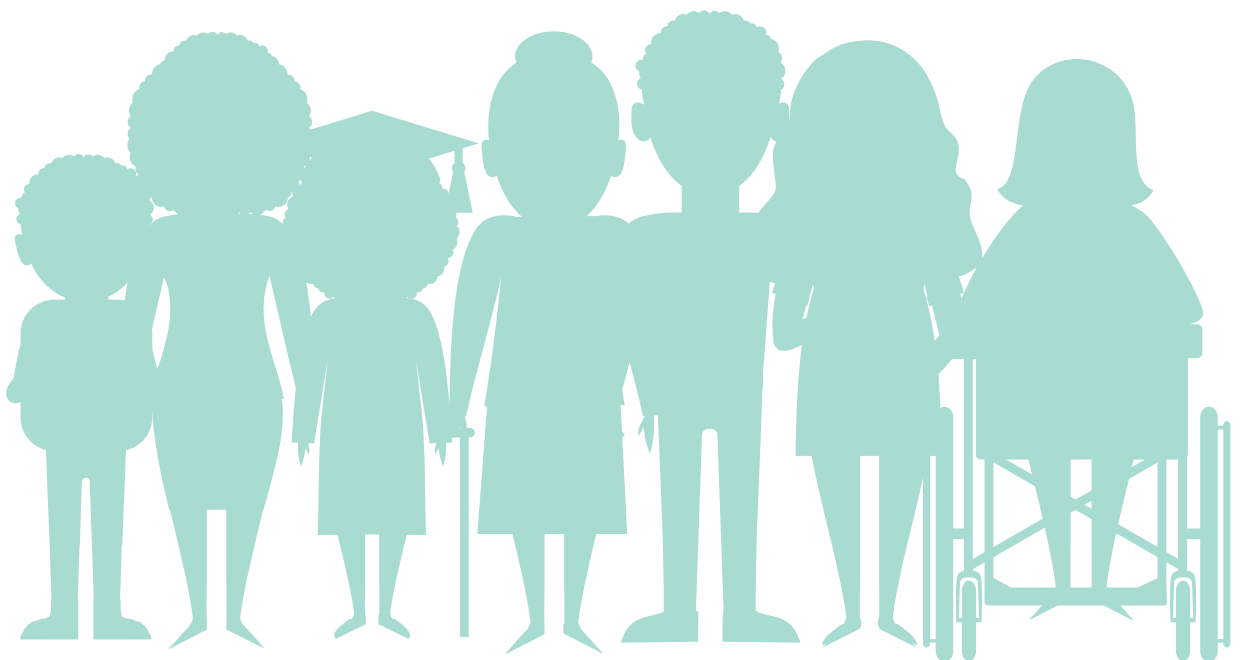
NAS aims to facilitate the person to be an active participant in decisions which affect their life, through the way in which the advocacy process is carried out as well as the outcomes it seeks to achieve.

## What NAS Does

Advocates take affirmative action to uphold the person's rights, ensure fair and equal treatment and access to services, and make certain that decisions are taken with due consideration for their unique preferences and perspective. The work of advocates ranges from information provision and advice, to longer term full representative advocacy.

Independent, representative advocacy empowers and is directed by the people who use it. It is person-centred, accountable, accessible, impartial and independent of service providers, families and other supports.

It involves professional, trained experts in advocacy dealing with specific issues and working with an individual until that issue reaches conclusion. Issues can be about any aspect of a person's life and the advocacy plan is directed by the person. Where the person communicates differently (through behaviour and gestures or assistive technology as opposed to verbal or written communication) the advocacy plan is still directed by the person. Where the person's will and preference cannot be ascertained, the advocate approaches the matter using four internationally recognised methods: witness observer; person-centeredness; a rights based approach; and 'ordinary life' principles.



## Statutory Basis of NAS

NAS is part of the framework of services funded and supported by the Citizens Information Board. CIB has, under the Comhairle Act 2000 Section 7, as amended by Section 4 of the Citizens Information Act 2007, among its functions the following:

- to support the provision of or, where the Board of CIB considers it appropriate, to provide directly, independent information, advice and advocacy services so as to ensure that individuals have access to accurate, comprehensive and clear information relating to social services and are referred to the relevant services;
- to assist and support individuals, in particular those with disabilities, in identifying and understanding their needs and options and in accessing their entitlements to social services;
- to promote greater accessibility, co-ordination and public awareness of social services and of information, advice and advocacy services provided in relation to such services whether by a statutory body or a voluntary body;
- to support, promote and develop the provision of information on the effectiveness of current social policy and services and to highlight issues which are of concern to users of those services.

**NAS will collaborate with CIB and the wider advocacy landscape to deliver a high quality advocacy service for people with disabilities, and to raise public awareness about advocacy.**

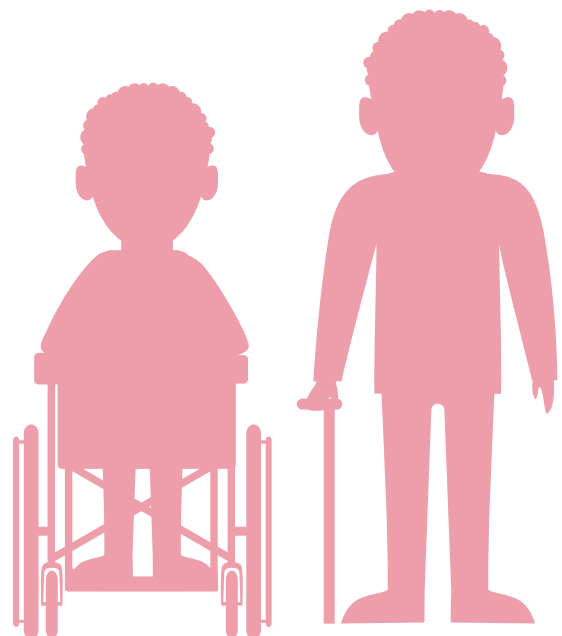
# The Strategic Plan 2018-2021

This first strategic plan for NAS brings together our leadership role and experience in providing professional, independent advocacy services for people with disabilities; and as a collaborative champion in developing and driving standards of practice in advocacy for people with disabilities across Ireland. The Strategic Plan is based around three strategic priorities; service, standards and policy.

NAS has provided a highly skilled, professional advocacy service since 2011. This Strategic Plan seeks to position NAS as the expert body on advocacy for people for disabilities service provision, and provide NAS with a roadmap to enhance the environment for providing advocacy services for people with disabilities in Ireland. The Strategic Plan sets goals and standards to measure the quality and output of the service we provide over the three-year strategic planning period.

The Strategic Plan is a high-level, three-year plan, and will be expressed through three annual implementation plans, which will define in detail inputs and outputs, assign responsibility and allow for quarterly monitoring. Work plans for individual members of staff will be created from the implementation plan.

The management team and Board will structure meetings and planning around the three strategic priorities and two key enablers of the Strategic Plan for the three-year period.





## Strategic Priorities

This Strategic Plan focusses on three key priorities; the continuous, measurable improvement of the advocacy service we provide, promotion of professional standards in advocacy, and contributing to the social policy environment in which NAS operates. These three strategic priorities are summarised as; Service, Standards and Policy.



### 1. Services

There is an emphasis on continuous, measurable improvement in the effectiveness and efficiency of the service over this period. The Strategic Plan sets out the objective of improved outcomes for people with disabilities through the provision of independent, representative advocacy throughout Ireland.



### 2. Standards

Advocacy for people with disabilities in Ireland is broadly defined and has developed largely in an ad hoc fashion. Consequently, there are no agreed uniform standards, nor is there an overarching approach at Government or policy level. This can be confusing for members or the public and for partners. NAS is committed to developing a suite of standards for advocacy for people with disabilities. Whilst the standards will be primarily for NAS, NAS will work collaboratively with other advocacy providers and commissioners to share the standards.



### 3. Policy

In addition to provision of a professional advocacy service, and the development of standards to enhance advocacy as a profession in Ireland, this Strategic Plan also creates a framework for NAS to contribute to the social policy environment in which NAS operates. As a frontline service, NAS advocates encounter many systemic issues in our social and health care system which adversely affect the lives of people with disabilities. This Strategic Plan creates a framework for NAS to identify the social policy issues that its advocates are encountering in providing the service, and to bring these issues to the relevant stakeholders. The Strategic Plan places an emphasis on the effectiveness of NAS as a service, and recognises the importance of recognising systemic issues and ensuring that they do not go unreported.

## Key Enablers

The Strategic Plan has also identified two key enablers to allow for the improvements and developments in the areas of services, standards and policy.






### 1. Awareness



First, the Strategic Plan places an emphasis on awareness. As a relatively new organisation, the initial years of NAS have focussed on delivery of the frontline advocacy service. It is important for the development of the organisation that the profile and reputation of the organisation grow and be recognised. Awareness as an enabler in the strategic plan will allow for greater access to the service for people with disabilities. On the policy side, increased awareness around the work of NAS will enhance the ability of NAS to contribute to social policy development, and ensure the important issues identified by our advocates are recognised and understood by relevant and strategic stakeholders.



### 2. Building Capacity and Enhancing Effectiveness

The second key enabler identified in this Strategic Plan relates to Building Capacity and Enhancing Effectiveness. This important enabler focuses on organisational and systems development, in the areas of human resources, training, IT systems, corporate services, and accessibility. The plan involves very ambitious projects including the introduction of an entirely new case management system, which will contribute to enhanced service provision, monitoring of standards and greater understanding of the policy ramifications of the issues that advocates and people who we work with face.

	Priority	Objectives	Outcomes
 <b>Services</b>	<b>1. SERVICES:</b> Goal - Delivery of an independent representative advocacy service for people with disabilities throughout Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivery of an efficient and effective advocacy service which can be accessed by the key target group.</li> <li>• Recognition of the NAS model of advocacy at national level 2021 through relationships with key partners.</li> <li>• Improved understanding of the reach of NAS and extent and nature of unmet need through research of our data.</li> <li>• Ensure that NAS has the legal powers to deliver on its mission.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People with disabilities have access to an efficient and effective advocacy service;</li> <li>• Enhanced understanding of NAS at national level through relationships and collaboration with key partners;</li> <li>• NAS produces data to monitor the outcomes for people who use the NAS service; and</li> <li>• Improved outcomes for people with disabilities through increased access to key decision makers via statutory powers.</li> </ul>
 <b>Standards</b>	<b>2. STANDARDS:</b> Goal - Establishing Advocacy Standards and quality practice for representative-advocacy, in collaboration with other organisations and to international best practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Representative advocacy – establishing the competency framework and quality assurance systems to underpin service excellence.</li> <li>• Achieving high standards within service partnerships.</li> <li>• Service user participation in standards development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of competency framework for advocacy for people with disabilities.</li> <li>• NAS has the necessary relationships at local and national level to develop standards.</li> <li>• Development of service user fora involved in the design and development of NAS standards.</li> </ul>
 <b>Policy</b>	<b>3. POLICY:</b> Priority - influencing a national approach to advocacy and public policy which supports people with disabilities and guarantees their rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be an instrumental voice and influence in the achievement of a National Strategy for Advocacy for People with Disabilities which:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ promotes and advances the rights of people with disabilities;</li> <li>◦ addresses the policy and practical barriers;</li> <li>◦ establishes advocacy for people with disabilities as a key pathway to being enabled to exercise and vindicate their rights;</li> <li>◦ Deliver a range of advocacy options suitable to meeting different needs and available in all relevant settings.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• NAS has developed a social policy profile in relation to issues relevant to people with disabilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NAS has been a key influencer in the development of a national strategy on advocacy for people with disabilities.</li> <li>• NAS has achieved a better understanding of advocacy in social policy arena.</li> </ul>

	Enabler	Objectives	Outcomes
 Awareness	<b>4. AWARENESS:</b> Through effective communications, raise public awareness of the NAS for people with disabilities	Develop a targeted communications strategy that delivers appropriate information to key groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• people who use (or may use) our service</li> <li>• partners</li> <li>• policy-makers</li> <li>• public</li> </ul> Train all NAS staff to be effective communicators about the service.  Communication from people who have used the service back into NAS.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development and implementation of a communications strategy.</li> <li>• Involvement of people who have used NAS in the design and delivery of the service.</li> </ul>
 Building capacity and enhancing effectiveness	<b>5. BUILDING CAPACITY AND ENHANCING ITS EFFECTIVENESS:</b> Enabling our work through good governance, effective management, people development and effective systems	Develop the organisation through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>GOVERNANCE</b> - an effective Board and senior management team;</li> <li>• <b>MANAGEMENT &amp; STAFFING</b>- enhanced capacity of staff and management through team development, training, practice development and resources;</li> <li>• <b>SYSTEMS</b> – develop ICT and other infrastructure to support best practice in advocacy practice, governance, finance, HR and other systems.</li> </ul>	<b>GOVERNANCE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieve consistent standards of excellence in all aspects of governance.</li> <li>• Establish Board succession planning.</li> </ul> <b>MANAGEMENT AND STAFF</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance strategic and operational management of NAS through strengthening the capacities and competencies of senior management, supported by appropriate systems and information.</li> <li>• Enhance service delivery through staff development and support based on service delivery and development needs and individual training needs analysis</li> <li>• Develop a staffing plan based on the overall NAS strategic plan</li> <li>• Effective management and deployment of NAS resources.</li> </ul> <b>SYSTEMS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective and efficient management information systems developed.</li> <li>• Establish best practice financial, people and legal support systems to underpin NAS delivery.</li> <li>• Plan for NAS locations that support service user access and effective team working by staff.</li> </ul>

## Background

### The Policy Context NAS Operates In

The development of the NAS Strategic Plan coincides with Ireland's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities<sup>1</sup>. As yet, Ireland has not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention, which allows individuals to make complaints to the UN committee.

There are a number of changes underway including the passing into law of the Assisted Decision (Making) Capacity Act 2015 (ADM) and the establishment of the Decision Support Service. When the Service is operational, this will lead to an overhaul of the legal framework around capacity and decision-making. The abolition of the Ward of Court process through the ADM Act 2015 and the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities represents a sea change in how people with disabilities are empowered to make decisions about their own lives. This Strategic Plan seeks to position NAS as an essential component in the State's response to meeting its obligations under the UNCRPD and to meaningfully enabling the guiding principles of the ADM Act to be respected.

In the national policy context, change in policy and practice in disability services is underway, notably under the implementation of the 'Time to Move on from Congregated Settings Report'<sup>2</sup>, through the Transforming Lives Programme which is closing large (over 10 residents) social care residential institutions and campuses. These policies emphasise a person-centred approach and require that people with disabilities have a voice in their services and future living arrangements, and increasingly effective participation in decision-making. These principles have been adopted by the Department of Health and the HSE in the Outcomes Framework for disability services. The consultation with people with disabilities which underpinned the development of these Outcomes emphasised access to advocacy as a key enabler.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/CN/2018/CN.148.2018-Eng.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/disability/congregatedsettings/congregatedsettingsreportfinal.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://nda.ie/nda-files/NDA-Paper-on-Outcomes-for-Disability-Services-May-20161.pdf> p. 4

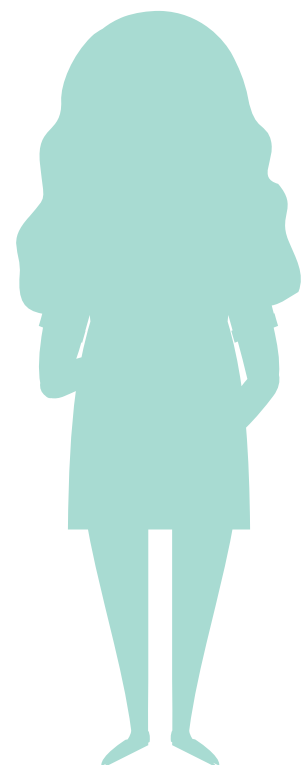
In 2015, a Joint Oireachtas Committee hearing on Advocacy for Patient and Social Care resulted in a report which recommended a National Patient Advocacy Service, to co-ordinate services and develop a Code of Practice in agreement with national stakeholders – ensuring that all professional and volunteer advocates operate to the same ethical and legal standards. NAS supports and will continue to work towards the establishment of a National Patient Advocacy Service. The work of NAS complements the aim of a proposed Patient Advocacy Service.

## The Establishment of NAS

Advocacy in Ireland has developed over the last 20 years and the growth and development of the National Advocacy Service came from disability grassroots activism, leading to a statutory requirement for CIB to provide an advocacy service for people with disabilities.

46 pilot advocacy projects for people with disabilities were established by CIB, which operated from 2005-2010, until the establishment in 2011 of a National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities by CIB. This model was based on five separate regional companies. A further review in 2013 led to the National Advocacy Service being established in 2014 by the CIB as a single independent non-profit company, taking over the responsibilities from the five regional companies with one national Board.

**NAS is funded by the CIB,  
and operates under a  
Service Level Agreement.**



## The Work of NAS to Date

From 2014 to 2017, NAS has:

- Established the organisation as the national advocacy organisation for people with disabilities;
- Engaged in long-term representative advocacy in 3,745 cases;
- Dealt with over 8,000 enquiries and pieces of information provision;
- Developed a national phone service;
- Highlighted social policy issues including:
  - the experience of parenting with a disability;
  - barriers to advocacy in congregated settings;
  - issues for people with disabilities in accessing their own moneys;
  - issues around capacity and decision-making; and
  - national standards in adult safeguarding.
- Built relationships at local, regional and national level including through regional and national advisory groups; and
- Raised public awareness of issues for people with disabilities through conferences and hundreds of promotional events.



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