



Service Delivery Framework

2026

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About this Framework

This Service Delivery Framework (the Framework) has been developed to support harmonisation, national consistency and the promotion of good practice in the delivery of the National Aged Care Advocacy Program (NACAP) across the Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN).

The Framework is designed to provide a high-level, national reflection of OPAN's principles and processes, with the expectation that they will be customised by OPAN members at the jurisdictional level. It also provides network members with a service delivery model that enables the experience of people accessing the NACAP to be similar nationwide, whilst still responding to local issues and needs.

This Service Delivery Framework is closely aligned with the National Aged Care Advocacy Framework (the NACAP Framework), which guides the delivery of a high-quality and nationally consistent NACAP.

The NACAP Framework outlines objectives, guiding principles, program activities, target groups, and mechanisms to ensure that program activities remain consistent, accessible, flexible, innovative, and of high quality.

The NACAP Framework suggests a nationally standardised, operationally efficient and highly connected NACAP can be achieved through a unified approach to how NACAP services are:

- defined and described
- accessed and delivered
- measured and reported
- marketed and communicated
- engaged in quality improvement.

OPAN's Service Delivery Framework provides guidance on national consistency against these key points.



About OPAN

History

The National Aged Care Advocacy Program (NACAP) is funded by the Australian Government under the *Aged Care Act 2024* (the Act).

OPAN is the primary grant recipient for the NACAP and subcontracts services to nine state and territory network members.

OPAN members include:

Australian Capital Territory:

ACT Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Services (ADACAS)

New South Wales:

Seniors Rights Service

Northern Territory:

Darwin Community Legal Service (DCLS)

Northern Territory Central:

Catholic Care NT (Central Australia)

Queensland:

Aged and Disability Advocacy Australia (ADA Australia)

South Australia:

Aged Rights Advocacy Service (ARAS)

Tasmania:

Advocacy Tasmania

Victoria:

Elder Rights Australia (ERA)

Western Australia:

Advocare

OPAN was formed in March 2017, following the 2015 Department of Social Services Review of *Commonwealth Aged Care Advocacy Services* (the Review). Prior to the Review, the nine state and territory organisations that now form OPAN had been delivering the National Aged Care Advocacy Program (NACAP) independently in their respective jurisdictions for over 20 years.

The Review highlighted opportunities to increase national consistency in aged care advocacy and recommended that a new aged care advocacy program should, wherever possible, seek to build on existing expertise and networks.

In response to the Review, the nine state and territory-based organisations originally delivering the NACAP came together in 2016 and entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU was developed to foster greater coordination, relationship-building, and the sharing of organisational knowledge and expertise, and to provide a national voice for aged care advocacy. Collaboration between the nine state and territory organisations was further formalised in 2017, when each agreed to establish the federation OPAN.

OPAN was formed as a non-profit organisation limited by guarantee and is Australia's peak body for individual aged care advocacy. This move enabled OPAN to successfully apply for the first national tender for the National Aged Care Advocacy Program (2017–2020). The provision of high-quality and nationally consistent aged care advocacy services was a key feature of this tender and the associated work plan.

In 2021, the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety acknowledged the crucial function of aged care advocacy, positioning OPAN as a critical service provider to support older people as they age. The Australian Government adopted the Royal Commission's recommendation¹ to boost advocacy services by increasing funding for the NACAP in the 2021/22 Federal Budget and inviting OPAN to be the sole tenderer for NACAP grant funding.

With a new influx of funding, OPAN and the nine network members entered a period of significant expansion and workforce growth. Between 2021 and 2023, the expansion of NACAP led to a significant increase in the aged care advocacy workforce and the introduction of new roles, including Financial Advocacy Officers and Community Development Officers.

1 Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (2021). Final Report: Care, Dignity and Respect. Recommendation 106. Retrieved from <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report>

In November 2025, the new *Aged Care Act 2024* (the Act) was introduced, addressing recommendations made by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety and establishing a new rights-based aged care system. The Act also introduced measures to recognise and strengthen the role of aged care advocacy. These measures included a new term – Independent Aged Care Advocate (IACA) – and an associated definition to describe the IACA role.

Section 7 of the Act defines an Independent Aged Care Advocate as a person who:

- a. is independent of the System Governor (the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing), the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (the Commission) and any registered providers; and
- b. is employed or otherwise engaged by a person or body that receives financial assistance under section 265 for the purpose mentioned in paragraph 265(2)(e); and
- c. provides either or both of the following to individuals accessing, or seeking to access, funded aged care services:
 - I. free, independent and confidential support, information and advocacy
 - II. education about the rights of individuals under the Statement of Rights; and
- d. is providing the services mentioned in subparagraph (c)(i) in relation to a particular individual – acts at the direction of the individual, reflecting the individual's expressed wishes, will, preferences, interests and rights.

The Act also introduced:

- Requirements for the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission and the Aged Care Complaints Commissioner to give consideration to the role, function and information provided by IACAs
- New IACA responsibilities as eligible receivers of whistleblower disclosures
- Aged care provider obligations under the Act relating to IACAs. These new provider obligations included:
 - Providing IACA access to residential aged care to deliver information, education and individual advocacy support.
 - Facilitating IACA access to Support at Home participants and their supporters.
 - Providing information on the Statement of Rights and supported decision-making to older people, including their right to access an IACA.
 - Acknowledging independent advocacy in their complaints and feedback management systems and supporting individuals to access independent advocacy when making a complaint or providing feedback.



Governance

OPAN's governance structure supports a consultative approach to decision-making for OPAN initiatives, including national consistency measures. The OPAN Board of Directors comprises up to one representative from each network member and includes an independent chairperson to provide advice and an unbiased perspective on decision-making.

Two committees have been established to provide assistance to the Board of Directors in fulfilling its oversight responsibilities:

- OPAN Finance Audit and Risk Committee
- OPAN Governance and Performance Committee

In addition to these committees, four advisory groups have been formed to ensure consultation and input into the development of NACAP projects:

- Advocacy, Operations, and Practice Advisory Group
- Policy and Systemic Advocacy Advisory Group
- Communications, Marketing, and Engagement Advisory Group
- Human Rights Advisory Group

Representation on the committees and advisory groups varies and may include representatives from network members, the National Older Persons Reference Group (NOPRG), OPAN staff, and external parties, as needed.

The NOPRG was established in 2019 to ensure that OPAN hears directly from and engages with a diverse group of older people across Australia. The functions of the NOPRG include:

- Providing diverse lived and living experience perspectives on systemic issues in aged care policy and services, and strategic approaches to reforms.
- Contributing to consultations, identifying challenges and priorities for systemic advocacy.
- Amplifying the voices of people from at-risk and underrepresented groups in aged care.
- Raising issues and sharing insights about aged care by engaging with their broader networks.

Vision

A society where older people are heard, informed and respected and where they enjoy and exercise their human rights.

Purpose

To facilitate an environment that promotes the human rights of older people and the ability for all older Australians to live well and be respected.



Guiding Principles and Code of Conduct

OPAN has identified nine core principles that guide the delivery of all NACAP services. These principles also provide the framework for OPAN's Independent Aged Care Advocates Code of Conduct, which describes the values and behaviours expected of advocates delivering information and advocacy support under the National Aged Care Advocacy Program (NACAP).

1. **Rights-based:** advocacy services are guided by relevant rights-based principles and legislation and aim to advance the human rights of older people, particularly those seeking and receiving aged care services, and those who are marginalised and most vulnerable.

This means Independent Aged Care Advocates will:

- act with respect for people's rights to freedom of expression, self-determination, and decision-making in accordance with applicable laws and conventions
- promote and enhance the rights of older people seeking or receiving aged care services
- support older people to understand their aged care rights and raise and address concerns when it appears that these rights have been breached
- seek to balance the right to autonomy with the right to dignity of risk by providing information on available safeguards for preventing and responding to abuse and/or neglect.

2. **Person-centred and directed:** the older person is always placed at the centre of the advocacy process, with advocates adopting a supported decision-making approach and acting at the direction of the older person requesting a service.

This means Independent Aged Care Advocates will:

- support older people to make informed decisions and be involved in decision-making processes to the greatest extent possible, even when substitute decision-makers are involved
- refrain from making decisions on behalf of an older person
- ensure that the advocacy supports they provide align with the older person's expressed views and preferences
- be transparent about the limitations of advocacy support
- not impose their own views, values, and preferences upon the older person they are supporting
- act with respect for the privacy, dignity, and confidentiality of the older person, in line with any applicable laws.

3. **Independent:** services are independent of aged care service provision and free from real or perceived conflicts of interest.

This means Independent Aged Care Advocates will:

- disclose, and take reasonable steps to remove or manage any conflict of interest. This applies to any actual, reasonably perceived, or potential conflicts of interest that are either financial in nature, concern relationships with others, or involve personal beliefs or attitudes that influence the impartiality of supports provided
- not accept a gift, reward, or benefit that is intended to, or appears to be aimed at influencing decisions or behaviour.

4. **Accessible and equitable:** advocacy services are accessible to all potential service users, at all stages of their aged care journey, with strategies in place to overcome barriers to access for those with diverse characteristics and life experiences.

This means Independent Aged Care Advocates will:

- act in a way that treats older people with dignity and respect, and values their diversity
- be proactive in removing the barriers preventing older people with diverse characteristics and life experiences from accessing and actively engaging in the advocacy process
- advocate for the rights of individuals to have their language and communication needs met through interpreters, translated materials, assistive devices, and alternate communication strategies.

5. **Informed by best practice:** service delivery is guided by contemporary best practice approaches and is delivered by a knowledgeable, skilled and professional advocacy workforce.

This means Independent Aged Care Advocates will:

- conduct themselves in a professional and responsible manner, and maintain clear professional boundaries
- provide high-quality advocacy supports to older people in accordance with OPAN Core Service Delivery Processes and Practice Guidelines
- be committed to maintaining knowledge and skills by actively engaging in professional development opportunities.

6. **Capacity building:** services embed a strong emphasis on proactive/preventative advocacy by strengthening the capacity of older people and their representatives to self-advocate.

This means Independent Aged Care Advocates will:

- provide older people with information and resources to support self-advocacy
- recognise the existing skills of clients and support them to develop the confidence to advocate for themselves.

7. **Partisan:** advocacy services are partisan, with advocates clearly positioned on the side of the older person, supporting them to raise and have their voices heard, and seek resolutions that align with their views and preferences.

This means an Independent Aged Care Advocate will:

- provide independent information on the legislative responsibilities of aged care providers, but not advocate on behalf of aged care providers
- not assume the position of a mediator.

8. **Partnerships:** advocacy services maintain constructive, positive relationships with key stakeholders to allow for collaborative approaches to advancing and upholding the human rights of older people, whilst maintaining the independence of the NACAP.

This means Independent Aged Care Advocates will:

- act with integrity, honesty, and transparency
- promote an environment that encourages respect and trust, and engages with advocacy clients, carers, and other professionals fairly, objectively, and in a courteous manner at all times
- with the consent of the older person, recognise carers, family members, family of choice, and other representatives as partners in care and advocacy.

9. **Continuous quality improvement:** advocacy services have strong governance and management systems that ensure services are designed for safety, effectiveness and efficiency, and to contribute to other quality assurance mechanisms within the aged care system through analysis of the systemic trends which emerge through individual advocacy work.

This means that Independent Aged Care Advocates will:

- actively seek feedback on the advocacy supports they have provided
- promote processes for making a complaint about advocacy supports.



NACAP services defined

OPAN is funded under the National Aged Care Advocacy Program (NACAP) to deliver a specific suite of services – information, individual advocacy, education and events.

These services have clearly defined service offerings, scope and eligibility criteria.

Information and advocacy

Eligibility for information and advocacy

Individuals eligible to receive general NACAP information and individual advocacy include:

- people accessing Australian Government-funded aged care services
- people seeking to access Australian Government-funded aged care services
- carers, family members, ‘family of choice’ and other supporters (registered or otherwise) of the above.²

Information

OPAN defines information provision as an episode of activity in which information is provided that is specific to an individual’s needs. The scope of information that can be provided under NACAP includes topics such as:

- understanding, accessing, and interacting with the aged care service system
- the rights of Australian Government-funded aged care recipients
- options and potential strategies for raising and addressing concerns about aged care services
- identifying, preventing and responding to the abuse of older persons
- aged care complaints processes
- advocacy supports available under the NACAP.

In many cases the provision of information can strengthen the capacity of an individual and/or their representative to self-advocate, and to raise and resolve issues or concerns independently. OPAN has developed a [Self-advocacy Toolkit](#) to equip older people with the skills, information and resources they need to understand their rights and speak up for better aged care.

Information can be provided in any format including face-to-face, over the phone, via email or other methods. Information provision may also involve referral to other organisations that are more appropriately placed to support an individual.

Advocacy

Advocacy is defined as the process of supporting a person to:

- understand and exercise rights
- make informed decisions
- have their voice heard, and views and wishes considered.

In the context of the NACAP, advocacy support is provided to eligible individuals to assist in addressing specific issues related to government-funded aged care services. This may include providing advocacy support to individuals so they:

- can effectively interact with the aged care system
- better transition between aged care services
- are enabled and empowered to make informed decisions about the care they receive through supported decision-making and other human rights-based principles
- can exercise their right to choice in accessing and receiving aged care services, and have their aged care rights better understood, recognised and upheld in line with the Statement of Rights
- have their aged care needs better met
- increase their capacity to self-advocate
- can resolve problems or complaints with aged care providers in relation to the aged care services they are receiving or seeking to access
- know their aged care rights and responsibilities
- are not subjected to abuse within the aged care system
- can address issues that impact their ability to live in their own homes, with the aim of preventing premature admission to aged care and focusing on wellness and reablement.

OPAN also employs Financial Advocacy Officers to provide specialist information and advocacy support related to aged care fees and charges.

2 with the consent of the older person, OPAN recognise carers, family members, family of choice, and other supporters as partners in care as well as partners in advocacy.

Individual focused advocacy support may involve:

- taking the time to listen and understand the views and wishes of older people
- informing older people of their rights and responsibilities under the Statement of Rights
- providing information to older people, their families and support network to assist them in exploring their options and making informed decisions
- assisting to clarify advocacy goals and develop strategies for addressing an issue or concern
- providing information which might enhance an individual's capacity to self-advocate
- providing practical assistance such as support to write a letter, organise meetings with aged care providers or accompanying a person to meetings
- supporting individuals to speak up for their rights, and prompting and reinforcing their expressed views and interests
- connecting people with other organisations that are more appropriately placed to support them.

Advocacy does not involve case management, counselling or mediation.

NACAP Prioritisation Framework

The NACAP Prioritisation Framework has been developed to provide guidance on the circumstances in which issues outside the scope of NACAP may be addressed. The Framework includes eight guiding principles which outline the conditions for providing out-of-scope support. The principles encourage consideration of the risks associated with not providing out-of-scope support to an individual where no more appropriate services exist. It guides network members on how to prioritise out-of-scope cases alongside in-scope cases and requires consideration of staff skills and training before providing out-of-scope support. All out-of-scope work must be approved by the network member CEO.



Education

An education session is defined as a proactive activity delivered to a group (more than one person) on a planned date, with the intent of increasing knowledge and understanding among participants.

OPAN is funded under the NACAP to deliver education sessions addressing two key topics: advocacy and aged care rights, and the abuse of older people.

Advocacy and aged care rights education sessions provide information on topics including:

- the Statement of Rights
- the role of advocacy in supporting consumers to access and interact with the aged care system
- how advocacy can support people who are unhappy with their aged care services.
- Education sessions on the abuse of older people provide information on topics including:
 - identifying and responding to abuse
 - strategies for preventing abuse.

Network members deliver these education sessions in their local jurisdictions.

In addition to these education sessions, OPAN delivers online, self-paced NACAP education programs targeted at aged care workers and health professionals. Current programs include:

- **Independent Aged Care Advocacy:**
A practical introduction: a short training module for the aged care workforce that covers the rights of older people seeking or receiving government-funded aged care services, provider responsibilities, and the role advocates play in resolving issues and concerns.

- **Supported decision-making:**
an eLearning program for aged care workers, professionals and providers that explains supported decision-making under the *Aged Care Act 2024*, provider obligations, how it applies in practice, the role of registered supporters, and how independent aged care advocates can assist with supported decision-making.
- **Abuse of the Older Person:**
an eLearning program for health and aged care professionals that supports responses to suspected, witnessed, or disclosed abuse of older people.
- **Responding to and preventing sexual assault in Residential Aged Care – Facilitators course:**
an online course for aged care educators to support the training of residential aged care workers in understanding the risks and indicators of sexual assault and believing those who disclose.
- **Who's Missing: Planning for Diversity:**
an eLearning course that helps providers plan and deliver inclusive services for older people. It provides practical strategies for identifying and addressing barriers, demonstrating compliance with the Aged Care Quality Standards, and embedding diversity in continuous improvement.



Eligibility for Education

Advocacy and aged care rights education sessions are targeted at people seeking and receiving aged care services in both community and residential care settings, as well as their families, friends and support network.

Education sessions on the abuse of older people have a broader target audience, including people accessing or seeking to access aged care services in both community and residential care settings; their families, friends and support network; aged care staff and volunteers; and other health professionals.

Events

An event is defined as an awareness-raising, relationship-building, or engagement activity delivered with the aim of developing community networks that will increase referrals for NACAP information, advocacy and education services. Events are typically delivered by the network's Community Development Officers.

Eligibility for Events

Events can be delivered in any non-aged care setting. The target audience for events include:

- general public
- community groups (Probus, Lions, Rotary)
- faith-based organisations
- community organisations and staff (non-aged care)
- private entities (pharmacists, hairdressers etc.)
- Local Government (libraries, community centre staff and customers etc.)
- organised local networks (non-aged care)
- commonwealth government bodies (Primary Health Networks (PHNs), Services Australia staff).

Systemic advocacy

OPAN defines systemic advocacy as influencing and working towards long-term change to legislation, policies, and practices that impact the rights and interests of older people.

OPAN utilises its role as the peak body for individual aged care advocacy to inform systemic advocacy and contribute to consultation opportunities on aged care and aged care reforms. OPAN's systemic advocacy is informed by qualitative and quantitative data from network members, engagement with the National Older Persons Reference Group, various internal advisory groups, and other peak bodies representing consumers, professionals, providers, and unions. OPAN and network members participate and contribute to many external aged care advisory group meetings, forums, and conferences. This includes both national and international government and non-government groups. OPAN is proactive in developing position statements, policy submissions, and discussion papers, and in holding policy forums on key systemic issues. In many instances, OPAN's systemic advocacy will occur in collaboration with other key stakeholders from the aged care, disability and health sectors. OPAN's systemic advocacy and policy work can also intersect with government departments beyond the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, including the Department of Social Services and the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Accessing NACAP services

NACAP services can be accessed through a range of channels at both the local and national levels. These avenues include phone, web forms, email, and connecting with NACAP services in the community.

OPAN practices a 'no wrong door' policy. This means that, regardless of how or where individuals contact OPAN, they will be connected with the network member best placed to support them.

Phone

OPAN's Aged Care Advocacy Line – the national free call number **1 800 700 600** – operates from 8.00am to 8.00pm Monday to Friday, and 10.00am to 4.00pm on Saturdays³.

During standard business hours, calls to the national number are connected directly with local network members.

The OPAN national contact centre answers calls to the national number outside of standard member organisation business hours, during periods of increased demand, and in circumstances where a network member is not available (i.e., state/territory public holidays).

OPAN member organisations may identify some individuals who could benefit from connecting with their local organisation via their direct phone number.

Web forms

The OPAN website features several online forms that can be completed by people seeking information, advocacy support or education. Once submitted, the forms are triaged by the OPAN national contact centre, which provides a first-response resolution where possible. Network members review all initial responses provided by the national contact centre and contact the individual within 3 business days to conduct intake assessments, where additional information or advocacy services are required.

Network members also have their own websites, which may offer alternative web forms that connect directly to the organisation for those seeking support.

Connecting with NACAP in the community

OPAN has multiple points of access throughout Australia, including in rural and remote locations. Currently, OPAN has over 60 points of access. While not all points of access have a physical drop-in site, they do ensure that NACAP has an established and ongoing presence in regional communities.

The Community Development Officer role is responsible for organising and delivering events in local communities, with the aim of increasing awareness of NACAP and connecting people with NACAP services. Advocacy Community Network Development (ACND) specifically targets communities outside the aged care sector that may not be aware of the NACAP, including diverse community groups. Refer to the definition of 'Events' on page 20 for further information.

The increased number of points of access, along with the introduction of ACND positions, means there are more network member representatives on the ground in regional and remote communities, delivering education, engaging with people in person, and connecting those seeking support with NACAP services.

³ The Aged Care Advocacy Line is closed on national public holidays.

Equity of access

The NACAP Framework outlines that NACAP will focus on providing information, education and advocacy support to individuals from diverse backgrounds and individuals who identify with a number of diversity characteristics, as per the *Aged Care Act 2024*. This may include individuals who are:

- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people
- veterans or war widows
- from culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- financially or socially disadvantaged
- experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless
- parents and children separated by forced adoption or removal
- adult survivors of institutional child sexual abuse
- care-leavers, including Forgotten Australians and former child migrants placed in out-of-home care
- lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or other sexual orientations or are gender diverse or bodily diverse
- with disability or mental ill-health
- neurodivergent
- deaf, deafblind, vision impaired or hard of hearing
- living in rural, remote or very remote areas.

OPAN has several strategies in place to support equity of access among these target groups, including:

- facilitating access to the following services when supporting people to engage over the phone or in person, at any stage of the advocacy process:
 - Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)
 - Aboriginal Interpreter Service (AIS)
 - Kimberley Interpreting Service (KIS)
 - National Relay Service
- offering and providing access to specialist advocates, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advocates, and Financial Advocacy Officers where available

- facilitating supported decision-making throughout the advocacy process
- providing flexibility to scope eligibility requirements, as outlined in the Prioritisation Framework, to address service gaps in rural and remote communities and maintain trusted relationships within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other diverse communities
- applying flexibility to the Core Service Delivery Process to ensure the diverse needs of individuals are met when seeking and receiving NACAP services (refer to page 16)
- providing advocacy support in settings and formats that are respectful of individual and community preferences
- ensuring the distribution of NACAP services across aged care planning regions and delivering planned outreach trips to rural and remote communities
- tailoring NACAP education content and delivery methods to meet the needs of specific groups
- networking, collaborating and maintaining strong working relationships with relevant industry bodies, local community leaders, and organisations supporting NACAP target groups.

In addition to these strategies, OPAN has also developed a practice guideline on providing advocacy support to individuals from diverse backgrounds.

This practice guideline aims to support advocates to:

- increase their knowledge of diverse groups, including an understanding of their histories, impacts, and possible trauma
- provide nationally consistent rights-based, culturally responsive, trauma-aware and healing-informed advocacy support to older people with diverse characteristics and life experiences
- collect nationally consistent data on advocacy support provided to people with diverse characteristics and life experiences.

Networks and linkages

In line with the *NACAP Framework*, OPAN aims to build and maintain effective networks and linkages with relevant stakeholders at the local, state/territory, and national levels. These connections assist OPAN in maximising NACAP's reach, establishing referral pathways, and supporting service access.

Networks and linkages include, but are not limited to, the following stakeholders and services:

- Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, including their local network of regional stewards
- My Aged Care contact centre and associated assessment organisations, including Single Assessment Services
- Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission
- Inspector General for Aged Care
- Services Australia
- Approved providers of Australian Government-funded aged care services
- Peak organisations representing aged care providers
- Organisations representing older people including those from diversity groups recognised in the Act
- The National Aged Care Alliance (NACA)
- Organisations representing people with disability, including funded providers of the National Disability Advocacy Program

- Relevant Australian Government-funded programs (Care finders, the Elder Care Support Program the Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme, Financial Information Service/Aged Care Specialist Officers in Services Australia etc.)
- The broader community and health sectors, including PHNs, general practitioners, hospitals, and allied health professionals
- Community legal, public advocacy, and guardianship services

OPAN has established formalised arrangements with some of the key stakeholders listed above.

OPAN has worked collaboratively with the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing to establish the Agent role on the My Aged Care Service and Support Portal. As Agents, advocates can support consenting individuals to engage with My Aged Care and access timely information about their progress within the My Aged Care system.

OPAN has also entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (the Commission). The objective of the MoU is to support ongoing and mutual engagement between OPAN and the Commission.

The Commission has established a system for prioritising calls from OPAN members within its contact centre. This supports OPAN to provide individuals with timely support to engage with and lodge complaints with the Commission. OPAN has also developed a practice guideline to support national consistency in advocacy engagement with the Commission.



NACAP service delivery

Information and advocacy

OPAN has developed a core service delivery process to support the nationally consistent delivery of information and individual advocacy support under the NACAP.

The process should be adopted by any network member staff providing intake, information, or advocacy support, including:

- Aged Care Advocates (including intake and specialist advocates)
- Financial Advocacy Officers
- Specialist Intake Officers at the OPAN National Call Centre

Network member staff may be responsible for delivering specific elements of the process or the entire process from start to finish.

OPAN has developed practice guidelines to further refine national consistency in the delivery of information and advocacy support. OPAN's current suite of practice guidelines address the following topics:

- Demand management
- Consent
- Engaging with the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission
- Providing advocacy support to individuals from diverse backgrounds
- Case notes
- Navigating complex situations

The development of new practice guidelines is ongoing, with new topics planned for release each year.

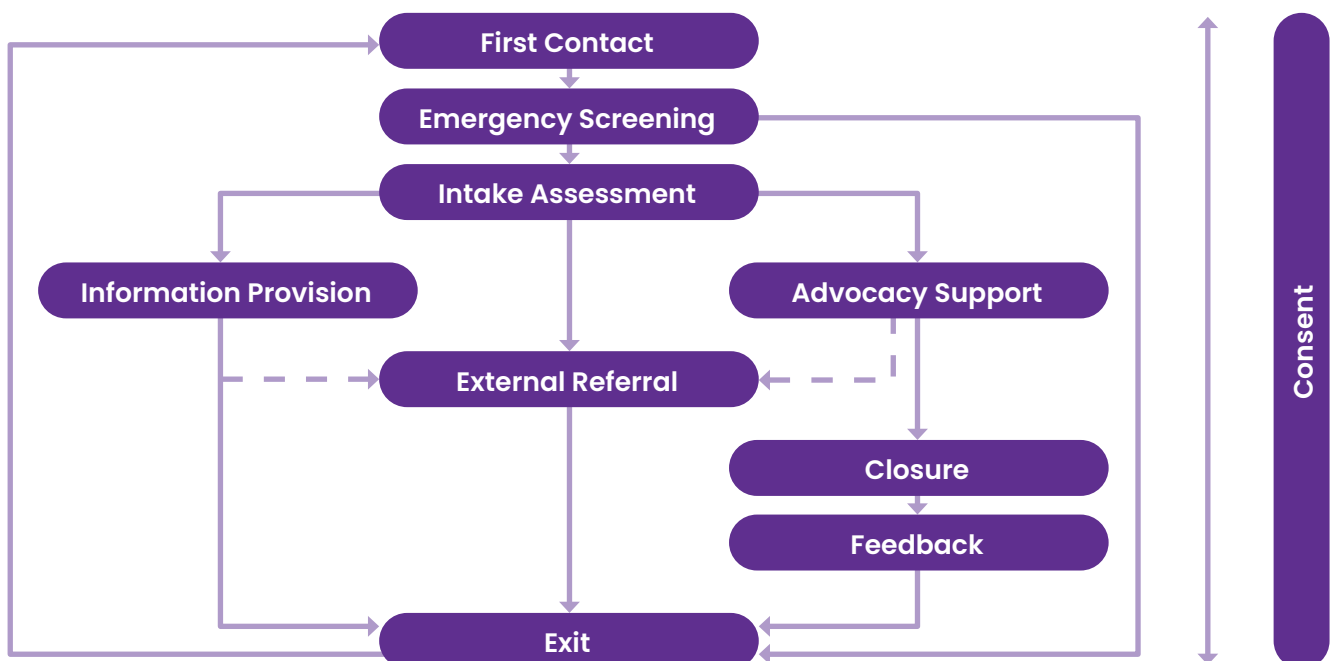
All services should be delivered in line with the OPAN Guiding Principles and Code of Conduct (refer to page 7). NACAP services are free, confidential, independent and person-centred and directed.

Core Service Delivery Process

There are 10 key elements in the Core Service Delivery Framework:

- Consent
- First contact
- Emergency screening
- Intake assessment
- Information
- External referral
- Advocacy support
- Closure
- Feedback
- Exit

The order of these elements may be applied flexibly to accommodate individual circumstances.



Consent

Consent should be sought at the commencement of client engagement and again before any actions are taken on behalf of the person. Actions requiring consent throughout the core service delivery process may include, but are not limited to:

- recording contact details
- referring to other services
- acting as an advocate for the client
- speaking to others on behalf of the client
- sharing the client's information with others
- receiving information about the client from other relevant agencies.

The *Consent to Advocate Practice Guideline* provides further guidance on how consent can be obtained, documented, limited, and withdrawn. It also addresses consent in circumstances where clients are subject to serious risk of imminent harm.

First contact

First contact occurs when the initial interaction takes place between an individual making an enquiry and an OPAN member representative or the OPAN National Contact Centre.

Emergency screening and external emergency referral

During first contact, an assessment should be made as to whether the individual is at immediate risk of serious harm. Network members and the OPAN National Contact Centre do not provide emergency or crisis services, however, if an individual is at immediate risk of serious harm, they may:

- advise the individual to call 000
- contact emergency services on behalf of the individual
- address the individual's needs and escalate service response
- arrange another time to speak with the individual when it is safe to do so.

Intake assessment

During an intake assessment, the OPAN National Contact Centre or network member representative will work collaboratively with an individual to undertake the following assessments:

- **Assessment of support needs:** Identify, discuss, and implement strategies to support the individual to engage more effectively at intake and throughout the provision of information and advocacy support. Strategies may include engaging interpreters, utilising communication aids, engaging supported decision-makers, or providing access to specialist advocates (i.e. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advocates).
- **Scope assessment:** Identify if the individual is seeking support for an issue that is within the scope of NACAP. Out-of-scope issues will be provided with a referral to a more appropriate service, external to NACAP.
- **Issues assessment:** Once it has been determined that the individual is seeking support within the scope, a more in-depth assessment of the individual's concern can be conducted to determine how NACAP services can assist and the individual's desired level of support. Pathways may include a combination of information, referral, self-advocacy and individual advocacy support.
- **Priority of access assessment:** Where waiting lists for advocacy support exist, individuals may undergo a priority of access assessment. The *Demand Management Practice Guideline* includes a *Priority Access Table* to help guide the assessment of an individual's priority access rating. The table considers the individual's presenting issues and circumstances and helps ensure that clients with high-level needs and/or experiencing disadvantages are provided with high-priority access to the NACAP.

The time between an individual making first contact with a network member and receiving an intake assessment should be no more than three working days.

Information provision

This includes information about advocacy, the aged care system, aged care rights and responsibilities, aged care complaints processes, and other services.

The provision of information can support eligible individuals to make informed decisions about how to approach an issue or concern. In some cases, access to relevant information may be all an individual needs to begin self-advocating. Information provision may also result in external referrals to other organisations more appropriately placed to support an individual.

External referral

An external referral may be required when it is determined that an issue can be more appropriately dealt with by another agency. External referrals may occur following the initial assessment, or during information provision or advocacy support.

Referrals may be accompanied by additional information or provided as a warm referral, with the client's consent. In some circumstances, network member representatives may need to liaise directly with external services either alongside or on behalf of an individual, to ensure that the referral is appropriate and that the roles and expectations of the external service are clear.

Advocacy support

An individual who has requested advocacy support and has been allocated an advocate to assist them with their concerns will be referred to as an advocacy client.

Advocates will discuss with clients how best to engage with them while providing advocacy support. Options may include over-the-phone, face-to-face meetings, via text, email, or video call, or a combination of these methods.

Advocates will arrange an initial meeting with clients to start gathering information and provide the client with an opportunity to tell their stories in their own words.

During this initial meeting, an advocate's role is to:

- listen to the client's concerns
- provide the client with information on their rights and options to address their concerns (as needed)
- discuss the client's advocacy goals and preferred advocacy actions
- document the agreed advocacy goals and actions in an advocacy plan.



Advocacy support can involve a range of actions to support clients in accessing or resolving issues and concerns with government-funded aged care services. Advocacy actions may include, but are not limited to:

- research
- information provision
- supported decision-making
- support to self-advocate
- support in documenting concerns/complaints
- support drafting correspondence
- support communicating and meeting with aged care providers
- support engaging with relevant government services and statutory bodies such as My Aged Care, Services Australia and the Commission
- continuing support during the Commission's complaints processes
- referrals.

The scope of agreed advocacy actions, the person responsible for implementing each action, and any associated timeframes will be documented in an Advocacy Action Plan, which will be regularly reviewed and updated during the provision of advocacy support.

In the initial meeting, and throughout the service delivery process, advocates will be transparent about the level of support they can provide and note any potential limitations associated with the achievement of the client's desired outcomes.

Advocates will also provide clients with information on how they can provide feedback or make a complaint if they are unhappy with the advocacy support they receive.

During the advocacy support process, if it becomes evident that the client's needs may be addressed more appropriately by another organisation, service or program, the client will be provided with information about alternative external services and be offered support to transition to the other service, if needed.

Closure

The conclusion of advocacy support will generally occur for one or more of the following reasons:

- The client's issue/s of concern has been resolved
- There have been no advocacy actions for the advocacy case for more than 30 days
- All advocacy options have been explored and the advocacy issue/s cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of the client
- The client withdraws from advocacy support
- The client is non-contactable
- The death of a client.

Feedback

Client feedback will be obtained to understand their experience of the advocacy support provided. To assess the impact of advocacy, outcome measures will be collected, with the client's consent, both before and after advocacy support concludes. Outcome measures include:

- NACAP outcome measures (measured before and after advocacy support)
 - Knowledge of their aged care rights
 - Empowerment to make choices and decisions about their care (self-advocate)
 - Understand what support services are available and relevant to their needs
 - Can access and receive aged care support services
 - Can discuss concerns with their aged care provider
- Advocacy service outcome measures (measured after advocacy support)
 - The advocacy service listened to me and understood
 - The advocacy service supported me to address my issues and access the case and aged care services that I need
 - Satisfaction with the advocacy services received
 - Willingness to recommend the services to others

Exit

Case closure and exit from the service may occur simultaneously, and prior to formal feedback being sought. Clients who exit a service may access advocacy services again if their needs change.

Education

OPAN members are responsible for booking and delivering education sessions on Advocacy and Aged Care Rights and the Abuse of Older People in their state or territory.

Education sessions are often tailored to the individual needs of each group and may be delivered using face-to-face, online or other methods. These sessions can also be tailored to meet the needs of diversity groups, as identified under the *Aged Care Act 2024*.

Network members typically contact the aged care providers within their state or territory every 12 months to offer an education session. However, in the absence of any legislation requiring aged care providers to accept NACAP education, there are many residential care homes that decline to accept this offer.

NACAP Education Guidelines have been developed to encourage national consistency in the:

- booking and delivery of NACAP education
- promotion of NACAP education
- processes for responding to, and escalating, concerns about providers repeatedly declining education.

Events

The delivery of events is guided by the *Community Development Officer Program Guidelines*. The guidelines set out five key types of events:

- Small group meetings with individual organisations
- Small group meeting with groups of organisations
- Network meetings and communities of practice
- Presentations at public events such as exhibitions, conferences, and shows
- Public stalls at exhibitions, conferences, and shows

Events may be standalone or utilise existing community resources, such as opportunities in local libraries, retirement villages, shopping centres, and expos. Events cannot be delivered in aged care settings. The delivery of events can be flexible to meet the unique needs of local communities.



NACAP data and reporting

Data

OPAN acknowledges data as a valuable, shared and strategic asset that:

- provides insights into the complex issues experienced by older people seeking and receiving aged care services
- enables the identification of NACAP service gaps and informs opportunities for NACAP service growth, redesign and continuous improvement
- demonstrates OPAN's achievement of service outcomes and national reach
- highlights increasing demand for advocacy support and identifies areas where additional resources are needed
- strengthens OPAN's credibility in contributing to systemic advocacy and aged care reform.

The NACAP Minimum Data Set (MDS) and associated reporting guidelines enable nationally consistent, high-quality data capture and reporting across the network. Together, these resources establish a shared understanding of definitions, counting rules, and outcome measures to ensure data is meaningful, comparable and suitable for performance reporting and sector analysis. They also provide guidance for the consistent capture of information relating to NACAP service activities, client characteristics, presenting issues, and service outcomes.

A mandatory online MDS training course supports staff delivering NACAP services to develop capability in applying the MDS requirements consistently in practice. This, along with the guidance material, is available in the Advocacy Knowledge Hub for staff reference.

The MDS requirements have been integrated into systems used by OPAN and its network members, enabling standardised recording while supporting improved data quality and usability.

Continuous improvement

OPAN promotes continuous improvement in data quality and maturity through two complementary Communities of Practice (CoPs).

The Salesforce CoP brings together the network's Salesforce Administrators to support consistent implementation of the MDS requirements within data systems. The group provides a forum to address system enhancements, share innovations, and resolve data recording challenges to improve reporting accuracy and national consistency.

The NACAP Quality Officer CoP focuses on aligning service delivery practice with MDS reporting requirements and data quality standards. This group promotes consistent interpretation of guidelines, supports quality assurance processes, and strengthens practice capability to ensure data accurately reflects advocacy activities and outcomes.

Together, these CoPs support ongoing refinement of the MDS 2.0 capture by aligning system configuration, reporting requirements, and service delivery practice, contributing to improved data quality maturity across the network.

OPAN's Data Strategy

The *OPAN Data Strategy* demonstrates OPAN's commitment to improving data maturity and data capabilities, and supports OPAN to achieve its core functions.

The *OPAN Data Strategy* also outlines OPAN's data vision, strategy outcomes (objectives) and core data principles (refer to Box A). These principles are supported by relevant OPAN and network member policies and procedures. A Data Governance Steering Committee provides strategic oversight of the implementation of the key elements of the Data Strategy, including frameworks for data governance, data management, analytics and technology.

The *OPAN Data Governance Framework* guides the oversight of OPAN's data management and sets minimum standards for handling the MDS. The *OPAN Data Management Framework* guides the practical application of data management throughout the data lifecycle. The *OPAN Data Analytics Framework* outlines the methodology that enables the consumption of data through a variety of reporting and analysis solutions. The *OPAN Data Technology Framework* guides the use, application and currency of technology and platforms that enable and enhance the use of data.

Reporting

OPAN's qualitative and quantitative data provide valuable insights into the role of, and demand for, advocacy services, as well as consumer experiences of the aged care service system. It is critical that government, the aged care sector, and the broader public have access to these insights as they can help inform policy development and necessary systemic reform. OPAN has formal processes in place for reporting on these matters. In addition to these formal processes, clear pathways have been established to ensure that network members can report real-time emerging issues to OPAN that can be escalated to the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, as needed.

Performance reporting

OPAN is required to provide the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing with a NACAP performance report on a biannual basis. Network members inform this reporting process by submitting quarterly performance reports to OPAN.

OPAN strategically seeks reports from network members on a quarterly basis to ensure the timely identification of:

- concerns relating to the achievement against key performance indicators
- increased demand for NACAP services
- emerging policy issues requiring systemic advocacy at the national level.

OPAN has established a standardised quarterly reporting template to capture qualitative and quantitative data from network members. The data supplied quarterly is extracted from quality-checked Salesforce reports from each network member's system. A *Guide to Completing NACAP Reporting* has been developed to support network members in understanding their reporting requirements and ensuring national consistency in performance reporting across OPAN.

Presenting Issues Report

Annually, OPAN releases a *NACAP Presenting Issues Report*. This publicly available report is informed by the qualitative and quantitative data collected across network members. The report provides insights into the number and types of issues that present in advocacy casework throughout the year and offers recommendations for addressing common policy concerns within the aged care system. A mid-year *NACAP Presenting Issues Report* is also produced annually. The interim report features quantitative data only.



Box A: Data vision, objectives and principles

Data vision

To lead a trusted and reliable data ecosystem that continuously improves across the network, enhancing analytical capabilities and driving informed decision-making to better advance the human rights of older people in Australia.

Objectives

Empowered decision-making	Enabling timely access to accurate, relevant, and trustworthy data, supports evidence-based decisions that advances the rights, dignity, and wellbeing of older people. By grounding decisions in robust data, OPAN can more effectively advocate for individuals and drive systemic change in aged care, always keeping the voices and experiences of older people at the centre.
Data-driven culture	OPAN will foster a culture where data empowers advocates to raise the voices of older people, identify emerging issues, and inform advocacy at both individual and systemic levels. Embedding data analysis into everyday practice strengthens OPAN's ability to influence policy, improve services, and uphold the human rights of those seeking and receiving aged care.
Enhanced capabilities	Building data capability across OPAN ensures advocates and staff are equipped with the tools, knowledge, and confidence to use data ethically and effectively. This supports culturally safe, trauma-informed, and responsive advocacy, and enables OPAN to continually improve its services for older people, their families and support network.
Improved efficiency and effectiveness	Streamlined data processes and integrated systems will help OPAN respond more quickly and effectively to the needs of older people, reduce administrative burden, and ensure resources are directed where they are most needed. Efficient data management underpins OPAN's commitment to accessible, high-quality, and independent advocacy.
Strong governance	Robust data governance will safeguard the privacy, security, and integrity of information entrusted to OPAN, reflecting the organisation's values of respect, accountability, and transparency. Clear governance structures ensure data is managed in line with OPAN's principles and the expectations of older people, their families, and the broader community.

Data principles

Clear stewardship	Data stewardship at OPAN and its network members involves clear accountability for data quality, accessibility, and ethical use. Data stewards are empowered to oversee data assets, resolve issues, and ensure data is managed in line with OPAN's principles and the needs of older people. This fosters a culture of shared responsibility and continuous improvement.
Security	Robust data security measures – including access controls, encryption, and monitoring – protect sensitive information from unauthorized access, breaches, and misuse.
Transparency	Transparent data governance builds trust among stakeholders by making data management processes, roles, and decisions visible and understandable. Open communication, clear documentation, and accessible policies enable scrutiny, collaboration, and accountability across the network.
Continuous improvement	Ongoing evaluation and refinement are inherent in OPAN's data strategy. Regular reviews, feedback loops, and adaptation to emerging needs and technologies ensure data practices remain effective, relevant, and aligned with OPAN's mission.
Collaboration	Responsible data sharing supports advocacy, collaboration, and informed decision-making while upholding privacy and security standards. OPAN enables data sharing within the network and with trusted partners, guided by clear protocols and governance.
Risk-based	A risk-based approach ensures OPAN's data management practices proactively identify, assess, and address the most significant risks to data quality, privacy, and compliance.

Marketing and communication

Marketing and communication activities support the delivery of the National Aged Care Advocacy Program (NACAP) by increasing awareness and understanding of advocacy services and supporting older people, their families and support network to access support when needed. Clear, consistent and accessible communication ensures older people are aware of their rights and understand how advocacy can assist them to navigate aged care services.

Marketing and communication activities are delivered at both national and state/territory levels. This coordinated approach enables OPAN to build national awareness of advocacy services while enabling network members to tailor communication and engagement activities to local needs.

At a national level, OPAN activities support the promotion of aged care rights, the role of advocacy and NACAP services, and issues affecting older people by increasing understanding across the general public, the aged care sector and key stakeholders. National marketing and communication activities include management of the OPAN website as a central source of information and referral pathway, delivery of national webinars and newsletters, social media engagement, participation in sector conferences and events, development of marketing and information collateral, paid advertising and promotional campaigns, and media engagement across mainstream and industry outlets.

OPAN also works collaboratively with the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission, the Inspector-General of Aged Care and other relevant peak bodies to ensure NACAP services are represented within broader national communication initiatives, where appropriate.

Network members deliver communication activities within their state or territory focusing on local media engagement, stakeholder relationships and community promotion, consistent with national messaging.

The OPAN Marketing, Communications and Engagement (MCE) Advisory Group supports coordination and nationally consistent marketing and communication approaches across OPAN and network members. The group provides a platform for exchanging ideas and supporting alignment between national and local activities. Strategies supporting national consistency include:

- **Key messaging**
Development and maintenance of shared key messages to support consistent and accurate descriptions of advocacy services across network members.
- **Co-branding**
Co-branded communication materials, where appropriate, to support recognition of both OPAN and network members. The News for You publication is an example of this approach, providing nationally consistent information while enabling local identification and connection.
- **Stakeholder and media kits**
Development of stakeholder and media resources to support consistent messaging across national campaigns and media engagement, while allowing network members to adapt content for local audiences.
- **Cross-promotion**
Coordination and cross-promotion of communication activities across websites, social media channels and other communication platforms to strengthen awareness of OPAN and network members, and the availability of advocacy services.

OPAN is committed to ensuring the voices and experiences of older people inform marketing and communication activities. The National Older Persons Reference Group (NOPRG) Marketing and Communications Working Group supports the inclusion of older people's perspectives in messaging and communication approaches.

Key principles underpinning OPAN's marketing and communication activities include:

- use of inclusive and respectful language
- clear and simple explanations of advocacy and its benefits
- authentic representation of older people and lived experience

- older people speaking for themselves or being featured in written case studies
- adherence to accessibility standards
- communication approaches informed by relevant social research.

Marketing and communication activities support awareness of aged care rights and advocacy services, enabling older people to make informed decisions and seek support when needed. Through nationally consistent messaging and locally delivered communication activities, OPAN strengthens access to NACAP services and supports older people to exercise their rights within the aged care system.



Engaging in quality improvement

OPAN's quality improvement initiatives are focused on the outcomes and experiences of the people receiving advocacy services. The people receiving advocacy services need to be assured of a consistent and high standard of service, no matter where they live or what service they are receiving. OPAN is continuously working towards achieving this goal by listening to the feedback of people who receive advocacy services, working with OPAN members to strengthen services, measuring performance against a consistent set of service outcomes and quality standards, and investing in a quality workforce.

Quality standards

In 2024, a new standard – AS 5391:2024 Advocacy in Ageing and Disability – was published by Standards Australia. The development of this standard was a joint initiative of OPAN and Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA), with both peak bodies recognising the need for an Australian Standard specific to advocacy in aged care and disability. The new Standard aims to strengthen and continuously improve advocacy practice, and to enable advocacy organisations to demonstrate to government departments that they are achieving meaningful outcomes for the funding they receive.

Following its publication, OPAN and DANA commenced work with the Joint Accreditation System of Australia and New Zealand (JAS ANZ) to develop a certification scheme that enables advocacy services to be independently assessed and certified against the requirements of the Standard.

In 2024–25, a technical committee was established to support the development of the scheme, comprising representatives from advocacy service providers, people with lived experience of using advocacy services, government departments, and certification bodies responsible for conducting audits. In November 2024, OPAN and DANA consulted with advocacy services and people with lived experience to gather feedback on the scheme's initial draft. Feedback from these consultations was reviewed by the technical committee, which endorsed the final scheme in September 2025. Work will continue in 2026 to further develop and test the scheme.

As work on the scheme progresses, OPAN members will continue to maintain their existing accreditation arrangements. All nine network members already maintain some form of external quality accreditation.

Monitoring and evaluation

Several *Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks* have been developed to provide a comprehensive and nationally consistent approach to assessing NACAP service delivery and outcomes. These include an overarching NACAP Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, supported by several sub-frameworks that capture key areas of service delivery, including:

- Information and advocacy
- Abuse of older persons – information and supported referral
- Education
- Advocacy Community Network Development (ACND)
- Home care and aged care costs (Financial Advocacy)

Each of the Frameworks includes a program theory and program logic model outlining stakeholders, inputs, activities, outputs, and intended short- and long-term outcomes. The frameworks also identify relevant theoretical and practice foundations, evaluation questions, outcome indicators, and data collection requirements designed to assess program processes, effectiveness (outcomes and impacts), and efficiency (value for money). Together, these components provide a structured approach to monitoring implementation, measuring outcomes for older people, and assessing the broader systemic value of NACAP services.

The Minimum Data Set is continuously refined as part of OPAN's data maturity journey to ensure data collection remains aligned with evaluation questions, emerging service priorities, and reporting requirements. Updates to data items, definitions, and outcome measures are informed by network feedback, governance oversight, and ongoing continuous improvement processes, strengthening the ability to measure program outcomes and impacts over time.

The monitoring and evaluation frameworks are subject to regular review and refinement through OPAN's data governance and evaluation processes, including oversight by relevant governance bodies and continuous improvement activities. Formal framework updates occur periodically, as required, to reflect program expansion, system changes, and evolving evaluation needs, with the current NACAP Monitoring and Evaluation Framework approved in April 2024.

Complaints and feedback

OPAN and network members are committed to being open and responsive to all feedback, including complaints. OPAN recognises that complaints are a valuable driver for continuous quality improvement and takes complaints seriously. OPAN commits to treating those making complaints with confidentiality, respect, and without retribution.

Each OPAN member has individual policies and procedures relating to complaints and feedback.

In line with OPAN's *External Complaints Management Policy* and procedures, complaints regarding the Aged Care Advocates Code of Conduct and/or the services provided by a network member will generally be referred to that network member for resolution in the first instance.

It is expected that the network member will undertake reasonable efforts to engage all parties involved, with a particular focus on ensuring the wellbeing of the older person remains paramount. If the complaint cannot be resolved, or a subsequent complaint is made to OPAN regarding the same scenario, the complaint may be managed by OPAN in consultation with the network member. This may involve OPAN acting as an intermediary, managing the complaint directly, working with an alternate OPAN member or members, or referring the matter to OPAN's Complaints Subcommittee. Complaints can also be directed to an external complaints management process, where appropriate.

NACAP Quality Officers

NACAP Quality Officers (NQOs) were introduced across network members in 2024 to support the implementation of NACAP national consistency initiatives. The role focuses on strengthening advocacy practice, building workforce capability, and supporting advocates to effectively understand and apply OPAN's guiding resources in line with local policies and procedures. NQOs also play a key role in promoting accurate data entry, high-quality reporting, and the consistent application of MDS counting rules at the local level

Workforce

A *National Advocate Professional Development Strategy* (the Strategy) has been developed to ensure that aged care advocacy clients across the nation have access to a consistent and high-quality workforce.

The Strategy recognises that the professional development of the aged care advocacy workforce is the shared responsibility of OPAN and the network members.

Network members, as the direct employers of aged care advocates, are responsible for:

- onboarding and orientation to their organisation
- ensuring staff complete, understand and apply mandatory OPAN training, the OPAN Service Delivery Framework and Practice Guidelines
- ongoing professional development across areas of core skills and knowledge
- Workplace Health and Safety training requirements.
- Professional development responsibilities of network members may also include:
 - individual professional development plans
 - providing access to Employee Assistance Programs and professional/clinical supervision
 - mentoring/buddy programs
 - leadership development opportunities.

One of the primary functions of OPAN is to support the delivery of high-level, best practice, and nationally consistent aged care advocacy. OPAN also plays an important role in fostering connection and the sharing of knowledge and experience across the OPAN membership. The professional development responsibilities of OPAN include:

- Development and promotion of nationally consistent and best-practice approaches to delivering NACAP services
- Delivery of the NACAP orientation program
- Development and monitoring of mandatory OPAN training supporting national consistency

- Supporting engagement and knowledge sharing across network members through the facilitation of national meetings, networking groups, and forums
- Maintenance of a Learning Management System to support national training initiatives and a national knowledge base
- Supporting knowledge development on national aged care system reform



Initiatives that have been successfully implemented by OPAN include:

- **NACAP orientation program**

The orientation program forms part of the advocate onboarding process and must be completed by all new advocates delivering NACAP activities. The program has been developed to support new aged care advocates to develop the skills and knowledge to provide high-quality and consistent advocacy support to older people.

- **Advocate Knowledge Hub**

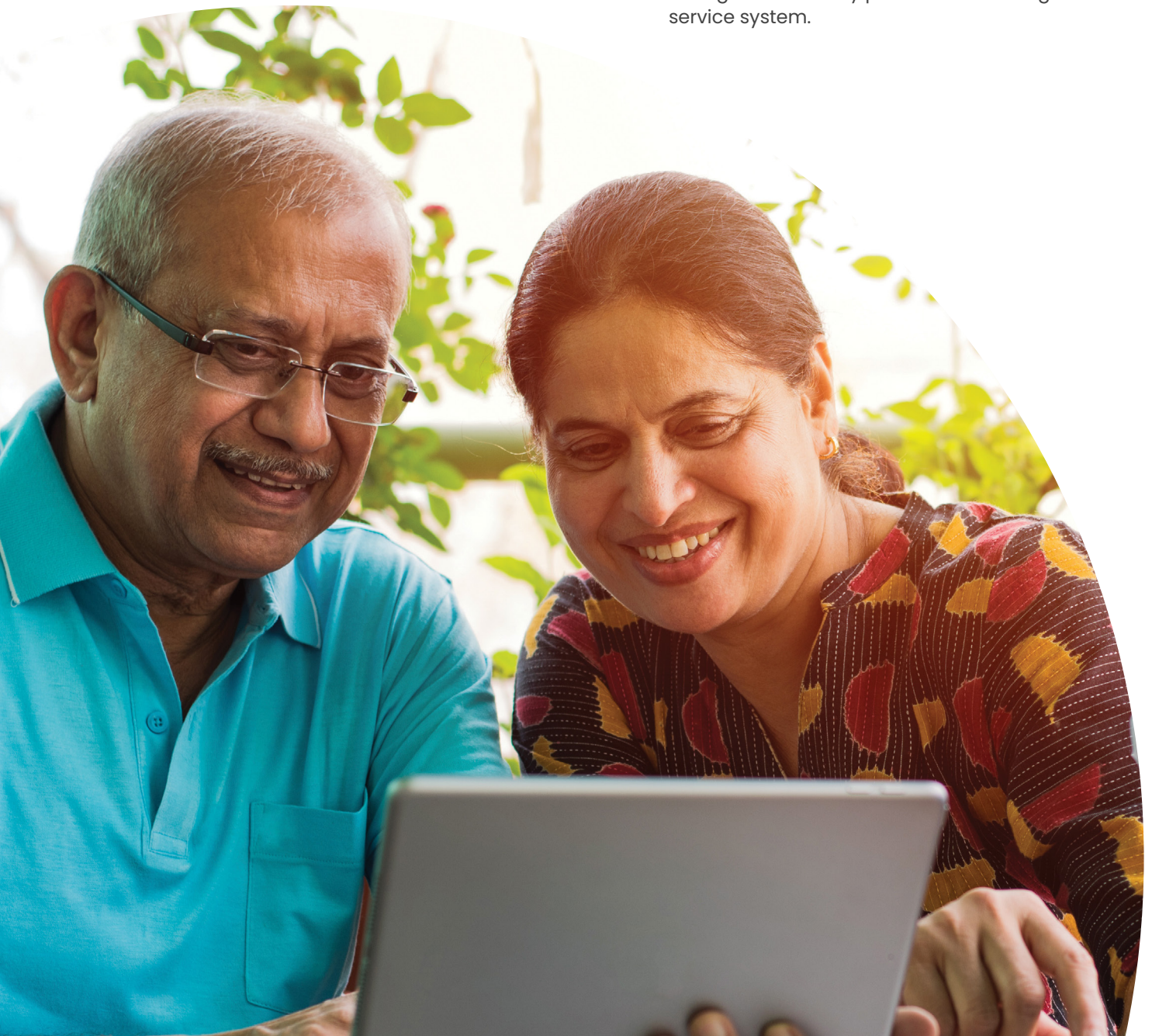
The knowledge hub is an information management system that provides advocates with easy access to a range of useful resources to support advocacy casework and nationally consistent practice.

- **National aged care advocate meetings**

Bi-monthly national aged care advocates meetings provide advocates from across OPAN with the opportunity to connect, share knowledge and experience, and discuss systemic advocacy issues that require a national approach. Each meeting features a topic of focus as well as dedicated time for discussion of emerging issues in advocacy casework.

- **National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advocate meetings**

This networking group meets bi-monthly and brings together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advocates from across OPAN, including those working for network members in programs other than aged care (i.e., disability, mental health). OPAN provides an opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advocates to connect and share their knowledge and advocacy experience. These meeting also support efforts to raise the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within OPAN and network members, and to influence positive change in advocacy practice and the aged care service system.



- **Communities of practice**

Communities of Practice have been established with the aim of improving the consistency and quality of practice through shared learning and problem-solving, and by providing a channel for mutual support. Communities of Practice encourage:

- learning from each other
- sharing strategic help with common issues and challenges
- acting as a 'brains trust' to bounce ideas off each other
- sharing success stories
- drawing on other practitioners' experiences to improve individual practice.

Communities of Practice have been established for Financial Advocacy, Aged Care Network Development, and Salesforce administrators.

Workforce capability

In 2020, OPAN commissioned Curtin University to conduct research exploring the skills, attributes, knowledge, professional development and training requirements for effective aged care advocacy.

The findings of this research project revealed that aged care advocates require a broad range of skills and knowledge to work effectively in their role. It also highlighted the crucial role that an advocate's values and attributes play in delivering effective advocacy support.

The report identified that there was no standardised set of competencies that described the characteristics of advocacy work and noted that advocacy competencies appeared to be broad and multi-faceted.

The report suggested that advocates may find it helpful to refer to a set of overarching competencies that define and explore their role. Such competencies may provide further clarity regarding the scope of the advocacy role. In addition, it was suggested that a formalised list of competencies and attributes could also be used by advocacy organisations to support recruitment processes, new employee onboarding, and the ongoing professional development of advocates.

The report noted that it is challenging to develop a one-size-fits-all approach to training and professional development, as advocates often enter the role with diverse skills, knowledge, and experience. This finding was reinforced in 2021, when OPAN received funding to expand the National Aged Care Advocacy Program (NACAP).

In 2021, as the NACAP workforce expanded rapidly, OPAN and network members began to consider how the aged care advocacy workforce could be supported to grow and develop, given its diverse professional backgrounds and development needs.

In 2026, the NACAP Capability Framework was developed with the aim of:

- introducing a consistent and shared language to describe the attributes and capabilities needed to be an Independent Aged Care Advocate
- supporting network members of the aged care advocacy workforce to understand what attributes, skills and knowledge are needed to be an effective aged care advocate
- supporting OPAN members with workforce planning, recruitment, induction, professional development and career progressions activities
- informing and guiding national professional development initiatives designed to address the gaps in workforce capabilities.

Tools and systems will be progressively developed to support the implementation of the Capability Framework across the network.

OPAN member organisations by state or territory:



OPAN is funded by the Department of Health, Disability and Aging through
the National Aged Care Advocacy Program (NACAP).