



OPAN Strategic Directions 2026–2029

Foreword

The Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) is Australia's national peak body for individual aged care advocacy, dedicated to upholding the human rights of older people. Through a national network of nine independent member organisations, OPAN delivers free, confidential and independent advocacy, education and information to older people in every state and territory, and, as the national peak body, also delivers sector training, data analysis and systemic advocacy.

Individual and systemic advocacy depend on each other. Individual advocacy protects the rights of older people one person at a time. Systemic advocacy turns that work into improvements across the aged care system. Neither stands alone: advocacy without evidence struggles to be heard; evidence without advocacy struggles to be acted on. Lived experience sits at the heart of both, and it's what makes the system listen, respond and improve.

The case for change is clear. Demand for advocacy is rising faster than funding. Rights-based reform, set in motion by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety and the new Aged Care Act, is progressing – but the voices of older people are still not fully reflected in policy and practice, and ageism is a large part of why.

Older people do not surrender their human rights at the door of an aged care service – those rights are universal, regardless of how age shapes the way someone is seen or heard. Technology, workforce pressure and system fragmentation are only adding to the risk of them going unrecognised.

Meeting this moment requires OPAN to evolve – in our influence, our use of data, and how we work as a national network.

This strategy sets our purpose, destination statement and the principles that describe the future we envisage for older people and the system around them.

We can't do this alone. This strategy succeeds through partnership: with older people, so their voices set the direction; with organisations that share our focus; and with the agencies and providers whose services shape what rights look like in older people's everyday lives.

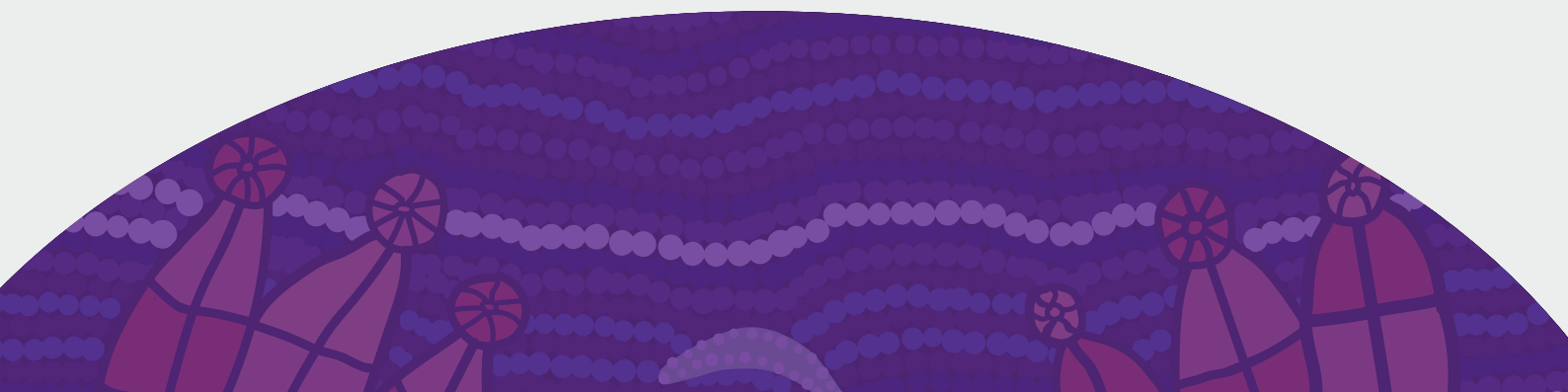
We share this strategy with our network, our partners, and the older people whose voices remain at the centre of everything we do.



Ara Cresswell
Chair



Craig Gear OAM
Chief Executive Officer



Our purpose

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

2032 Destination Statement

Demand for advocacy is rising faster than funding will match, the system around older people is changing under sustained pressure, and there continues to be a gap between rights on paper and rights in practice. OPAN will evolve how advocacy is delivered, and increase productivity and efficiency across the network so that by 2032:

- Older people in Australia fully experience their human rights and fundamental freedoms in law, policy and practice in their everyday lives. They can access and navigate aged care in ways that meet their needs and preserve their dignity, autonomy and cultural identity, regardless of location, background, economic means or digital capability.
- OPAN's national network functions as a unified rights-protection system.
- The voices of older people and the issues they raise are central drivers of a transformed aged care system.
- Evidence drawn from individual advocacy consistently shapes change to policy, the actions of providers and regulatory settings and practice.
- We identify emerging risks early. Systemic and local advocacy work together to strengthen the system's ability to listen, respond and act.
- Governments and providers design services that are safer, fairer and more responsive to the lived experiences of older people.

Through its collective influence, OPAN has contributed to an aged care system that is more transparent, more responsive, more accountable and more resilient to the challenges and pressures of demographic change, technological transformation, and economic and climate impacts.

In short, the systems supporting older Australians are better designed, more equitable and fundamentally more human rights-based than today, and OPAN's advocacy network has played a demonstrable part in making that so.

Our Strategic Directions set out the **first three years** towards this destination.



Principles that shape how we work and lead

- **Rights are realised in practice, not only promised.** Every older person is entitled to have their human rights and dignity respected.
- **National impact depends on strong local service delivery and trust.** OPAN's strength comes from being a national network of independent organisations and a peak body that older people and their families already know and rely on.
- **Individual advocacy, national data and systemic influence work together.** What we learn from individual advocacy informs and shapes our systemic and policy advocacy and strengthens the case for change. Neither works as effectively without the other.
- **Diverse voices strengthen systemic advocacy, including when they disagree.** Good advocacy and good governance depend on hearing from older people, independent advocates and our network members.
- **Harmonisation sets the foundation. Local knowledge shapes delivery.** Consistent standards, advocacy practice, data governance and messages make the network strong. How they are delivered reflects the communities, cultures, and the relationships on the ground.



All who are within our network, work with us or volunteer, commit to our values

We live our values:

Respect and integrity

Accountability and transparency

Justice and equity

Working and learning together



Queensland

Aged and Disability Advocacy Australia provides advocacy support for older people and people with disability.



Western Australia

Advocare supports and protects the rights of older people through information, advocacy and education services.



Northern Territory – Top End

Darwin Community Legal Service provides advocacy and legal advice, supporting the rights of



Australian Capital Territory

ACT Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service supports people with disability, mental ill-health, older persons and carers.



South Australia

Aged Rights Advocacy Service offers advocacy, information, and education to older people on aged care and abuse prevention.



Victoria

Elder Rights Australia promotes and supports the human rights of all older people to be socially connected and to receive safe, quality aged care.



Tasmania

Advocacy Tasmania works for older people, people with disability or a mental health condition, and people using alcohol and drugs.



Northern Territory – Barkly and Central Australia

CatholicCare NT provides advocacy support to older



New South Wales

Seniors Rights Service provides advocacy and legal advice, supporting the rights of all older people.

Strategic Directions 2026–2029

Our focus	Strategic Directions
A. Human rights for older people are realised in practice <i>Rights are experienced, not just promised</i>	SD1: Ensure individual advocacy and the voices of older people consistently inform systemic change. SD2: Through partnerships and OPAN services, focus on preventing abuse within aged care. SD3: Advance the human rights of older people by building supported decision-making capability among older people, and rights and diversity literacy among providers and the broader community.
B. A strong, trusted national advocacy voice informed by advocacy data, lived experience and outcomes evidence <i>Influence through independence</i>	SD4: Use advocacy data and insights to drive systemic change through clearly defined, complementary peak body and network member roles. SD5: Amplify local advocacy insights and older people's voices to influence national reform. SD6: Realise national harmonisation and local autonomy explicitly and transparently.
C. Advocacy models that match need, scale and complexity <i>The right support, at the right intensity</i>	SD7: Evolve advocacy service models towards responsive, proportionate and risk-based advocacy support that increases productivity and efficiency while ensuring support is personalised to the needs of the older person. SD8: Use technology ethically to extend capacity and reach while preserving human connection and trust. SD9: Increase advocacy access for people facing digital, cultural, geographic or other barriers.
D. Capable, resilient and cohesive network <i>Sustainability and impact over time</i>	SD10: Build shared capability in leadership, change, digital and data to drive continuous quality improvement across the network to increase productivity and the value older people and their communities receive from advocacy. SD11: Engage network members and reference groups to meaningfully shape strategic decisions and collectively drive their implementation. SD12: Increase opportunities to grow and diversify funding to expand human rights-based advocacy and capacity-building for older people.

Success measures

- Evidence of advocacy shaping policy or regulatory change.
- Measurable reduction in recurring issues achieved through system reform or a change in provider practices.
- Network capability uplift achieved (service, digital, data, leadership).
- Diversified funding sources create capacity to support broader human rights advocacy.
- Demonstrate financial return on investment for grant funding.

Key enablers

- Cross-cutting enablers are the capabilities and ways of working that every strategic direction relies on. They sit across all four focus areas, not under any single one:
 - A. The voice and experience of older people and individual advocacy informing systemic advocacy
 - B. Sound, well-governed data and evidence systems that strengthen systemic advocacy.
 - C. Strategic communications, engagement and marketing
 - D. Ethical and safe use of technology and AI that has human safeguards and increases capacity and ability to deliver on older people's rights.
- Skilled and resilient workforce.
- Clear governance and decision-making across the OPAN Board, the Chief Executive Officer, Foundation Members and the network's collective forums.
- Trust and information-sharing across the network.



Strategic Activities 2026–2029

A. Human rights for older people are realised in practice

Rights are experienced, not just promised

Strategic Directions

Strategic Activities

SD1: Ensure individual advocacy and the voices of older people consistently inform systemic change.

SA1: Translate what is learned from individual advocacy, older people's lived experience and voices into systemic advocacy to bring about reform.

SD2: Through partnerships and OPAN services, focus on preventing abuse within aged care.

SA2: Focus abuse prevention work within aged care, using the prioritisation framework to guide any response where older people experience abuse beyond aged care settings.

SD3: Advance the human rights of older people by building supported decision making capability among older people, and rights and diversity literacy among providers and the broader community.

SA3: Build the understanding and capability of older people, providers and the broader community to recognise, exercise and uphold rights and supported decision making in practice through local and national communication, marketing and education programs and systemic advocacy.

B. Strong, trusted national advocacy voice informed by advocacy data, lived experience and outcomes evidence

Influence through independence

Strategic Directions

Strategic Activities

SD4: Use advocacy data and insights to drive systemic change through clearly defined, complementary peak body and network member roles.

SA4: Ensure peak body, network member and older people's reference group roles are clearly defined and complement each other, so the network operates efficiently and maximises its impact for older people.

SD5: Amplify local advocacy insights and older people's voices to influence national reform.

SA5: Create reliable pathways from local advocacy to national advocacy priorities so that older people's voices directly inform and strengthen OPAN's systemic advocacy to improve outcomes for older people.

SD6: Realise national harmonisation and local autonomy explicitly and transparently.

SA6: Develop and maintain a clear framework for where national harmonisation is required and where local adaptation strengthens delivery, with transparent decision-making about how that balance is managed.

C. Advocacy models that match need, scale and complexity

The right support, at the right intensity.

Strategic Directions

Strategic Activities

SD7: Evolve advocacy service models towards responsive, proportionate and risk-based advocacy support that increases productivity and efficiency while ensuring support is personalised to the needs of the older person.

SD8: Use technology ethically to extend capacity and reach while preserving human connection and trust.

SD9: Increase advocacy access for people facing digital, cultural, geographic or other barriers.

SA7: Design and implement responsive, proportionate and risk-based advocacy support, with the intensity of support personalised to the needs of each older person.

SA8: Adopt digital tools, AI and platforms that extend the capacity, reach, efficiency and impact of advocacy, in a manner governed by clear ethical principles and human safeguards that protect older people and prioritise human connection and trust where it matters most.

SA9: Monitor and address barriers to access so that older people from diverse backgrounds, locations and circumstances can access advocacy when they need it.

D. Capable, resilient and cohesive network

Sustainability and impact over time.

Strategic Directions

Strategic Activities

SD10: Build shared capability in leadership, change, digital and data to drive continuous quality improvement across the network to increase productivity and the value older people and their communities receive from advocacy.

SD11: Engage network members and reference groups to meaningfully shape strategic decisions and collectively drive their implementation.

SD12: Increase opportunities to grow and diversify funding to expand human rights-based advocacy and capacity- building for older people.

SA10: Invest in shared capability across the network and ground continuous quality improvement in practice, data, older people's feedback and outcome evidence, to enable the peak body and network members to manage the pace and complexity of reform.

SA11: Strengthen how network members and key reference groups contribute to shaping decisions and how the network collectively implements, recognising that disciplined implementation across the network is essential to maximising impact for older people.

SA12: Pursue emergent opportunities to diversify funding to expand OPAN's capacity for broader human rights-based advocacy and education, beyond what the national aged care advocacy contract alone can support.

OPAN member organisations

