



Victorian State Election Advocacy Toolkit





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Introduction

Systemic advocacy is all about making positive change on behalf of the rights and interests of a group of people. It is about identifying a problem that affects a number of people and working strategically to create change to fix that problem for everyone.

State elections are a ripe opportunity for disability advocacy organisations to leverage the political cycle and amplify the issues that are important to them and are at the heart of their work. There are several tactics you can use within this election cycle to optimise your opportunities and make sure your asks are committed to.

About this resource

This resource is designed to help disability advocates and disability advocacy organisations prepare for the upcoming Victorian State Election.

In this resource, you will find

- Information on advocacy during elections and how election cycles work
- How to go about reaching the right people
- How to begin building your election platform
- What election advocacy tactics you may like to consider, &
- What advocacy activities you may like to consider this election year

About the Disability Advocacy Resource Unit

The Disability Advocacy Resource Unit (DARU) is unique in Australia as a dedicated resource unit funded to work with disability advocates to promote and protect the rights of people with disability.

It develops and distributes resources to keep disability advocates informed and up to date about issues affecting people with disability in Victoria. It organises forums to provide opportunities for a co-ordinated approach to issues of concern, provides professional development opportunities and undertakes capacity building projects.

State elections are a ripe opportunity for disability advocacy organisations to leverage the political cycle and amplify the issues that are important to them and are at the heart of their work.

Advocacy during elections

Election cycles¹

In Victoria, elections occur in four-year cycles with each year providing different opportunities to progress your advocacy.

Electoral Cycle Year	Description	Opportunity
Year One	The party that forms government is predominantly focused on enacting election promises. The party that forms the opposition is predominantly focused on reviewing its campaign, identifying areas for refinement (including policy) and holding the new government to account for its election commitments.	Identify opportunities to progress your issues via the design and implementation of relevant policies/ programs. Good opportunity to meet with each party.
Year Two	Government continues to implement its election commitments. All parties (including government) are responsive to hearing new ideas, particularly policies and programs that reflect their priorities and build on their existing platform.	Be proactive in putting forward bold new policy ideas and asks, taking care to show how these strategically align with their interests.
Year Three	Parties concurrently focus on this term while positioning themselves for the next election.	Continue to proactively feed ideas for this term of government, while thinking ahead to potential flagship initiatives that parties could adopt in their election policy platforms.
Year Four	All parties are focused on promoting their achievements in this term, setting out their future vision, and begin progressively sharing their policy platform for the next term. This will include announcements of pre-election commitments as the election draws nearer.	Present a range of asks, including legislative change, policy development and costed programs. Try to secure pre-election commitments from parties for the policy or program you are championing. Be united with the sector – one consistent voice is more powerful.

** Note that in 2026, we are currently in 'Year Four'. So, 'Year One' mentioned above will be in 2027, Year 2 in 2028 and Year 3 in 2029.

¹ The information on Election cycles has been adapted from DARU's Systemic Advocacy Course available [here](#).

What can we expect in an election year?

Victoria holds state elections on the last Saturday in November every four years. This date is set by the Electoral Act (Vic) 2022.

- In May, the current sitting government will hand down the Victorian State Budget, as usual practice.
- Parliament schedules are truncated in an election year, with final sitting days in August.
- Caretaker period usually commences in the month of November leading up to an election year. In this period, we are likely to see some pre-election announcements made by different parties. Caretaker period means that the current sitting government cannot make any crucial decisions that will bind a future elected government to commit to.
- October to November are critical months, with early voting opening two weeks before election day.

Reaching the right people

Once you have identified your key messages for your platform, it is now time to work through who holds the power to assist you to influence change and address your issue. It is important to understand the persons key responsibilities, portfolio and areas of interest, when considering engaging with:

- Your Local State Member of Parliament
- Your Local candidates from other political parties.
- State Senators
- Other Members of Parliament interested in your issue or overseeing inquiries relating to your issue (for example, this could include Members of Parliament with lived experience, or those who are part of a particular interest group).

- Public servants who oversee your funding (if you receive government funding), or the policy or strategy for your issue, or provide secretariat to committees or reviews.

Remember that it takes time to build trust and relationships, so plan to meet with who you want to engage with regularly to build the relationship and get to know them.

Take the time to research people and be strategic in who you reach out to. It is important to be targeted in who you are going to engage with as part of your election advocacy activities.

It is also valuable to know where State MPs or political candidates stand on issues impacting people with disabilities.

A good way to find out what a Member of Parliament cares about and who is interested in your issue is to do a bit of research. You can easily find out a politician's background, their interests and belief systems through their online biographies and speeches in parliament.

To find out who currently represents your district and region, use the Victorian Electoral Council's [find my electorate](#) tool.

You can also search for all the current members of the Victorian State Parliament [here](#).

A list of all currently registered political parties and their contact details can be found [here](#).

Election advocacy tactics²

Tactic	Description
Pre-election	
Election Platform	<p>Prepare an election platform that outlines your clear, evidence-backed policy asks.</p> <p>More information on building your election platform can be found in this resource.</p>
Launch of Election Platform	<p>Launch the platform either online or at a public forum. The launch is the commencement of your promotion/awareness raising.</p>
Distribution/Promotion of Platform	<p>Send the platform to politicians and candidates. Also think about how you promote the platform in the media and social media in an ongoing way over the course of the campaign.</p> <p>* There are rules and guidelines for sharing something that is considered 'electoral campaign material'. For further guidance, please see information provided by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission • Victorian Electoral Commission
Request for formal responses from parties and independents	<p>Officially request the positions of different parties on the policy platform or specific policy/program. Request this from party officials and parliamentary leaders.</p>
Election Forum	<p>Hold an election forum or become involved with a peak body holding an election forum/debate. Ask a representative from each party to be involved.</p>
Post election	
Keep track of Election commitments	<p>This provides for a useful Government relations resource for your organisation after the election when a new or re-elected Government is formed. That way you will have sense on where parties stand on some of your issues and what work you may need to do.</p>
Incoming Government Brief	<p>Prepare a brief for the incoming government on your issue or draft letters for both sides of parliament.</p>

² These tactics have been adapted from DARU's Systemic Advocacy Course available [here](#)

Building an election platform

Election asks

Effective advocacy always includes ideas and recommendations for solutions that will achieve change.

These solutions are often called ‘asks’ as you are ‘asking’ for something that is a clear solution to the problem.

While building your election platform, you might like to consider the types of asks you are including. These might be:

- **A legislative ask** – you might want a new law introduced and a current law changed. For example, you may be seeking a change that requires amendment to the Public Health Act.
- **A policy ask** – you might be advocating for a policy to be developed, this could be a Strategy or Action Plan. For example, many across the sector have been calling for a National Housing and Homelessness Strategy.
- **A program or funding ask** – you might be advocating for new program funding, or the continuation of an existing program. For example, a 50% increase of funding to the Victorian Disability Advocacy Program.
- **A process ask** – you might be seeking a process to be undertaken as part of your strategy. For example, you may be calling for an Inquiry into a particular issue. Another example of a process type ask is if you’re calling for the establishment of a Committee or Advisory Group to oversee implementation or development of a Government strategy³.

Whatever the ‘ask’ is, make sure it is clear, tangible and realistically achievable!

When writing your election platform, try to keep it short, easy to read and accessible.

Here are some tips to help you get started:

1. Start thinking about what recurrent systemic barriers you are seeing in your casework and hearing about through your networks.
2. Gather ‘evidence’ of these systemic barriers by analysing case work trends and intake data.
3. Think about what you would like to ‘ask’ local candidates and parties to commit to. We suggest prioritising 5–8 key asks, to keep your election platform concise. You may like to consider what issues have cross-sector support to help you narrow down your top asks.
4. Talk to community and co-design with people with disability. You can reach out to self-advocacy groups in your area or people with lived experience to test ideas.
5. Build a case for each ask. One example of how you may choose to frame each ask is as follows.

Problem: Clearly define the problem and why it matters to people with disability.

Evidence: Provide brief data or reference data or findings from recent inquiries or the Royal Commission into the Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disabilities. Using lived experience stories can be a powerful tool to showcase the heart of the problem, the lives that are impacted and showcase the urgency of the problem.

Ask: Clearly state your ‘solution’, or what you are asking the candidate or party to commit to. This solution should be practical and feasible.

Outcome: Clearly express what outcome this is likely to achieve and how it is likely to be measured.

³ These asks have been adapted from DARU’s Systemic Advocacy Course available [here](#)

Useful statistics to support your advocacy

Your election platform should be backed up by evidence and data that strengthens your arguments, builds credibility and demonstrates how the change you've asked for is really going to make a positive impact.

A good starting point to find statistics, research and data are below

- Australian Bureau of Statistics – in particular, the [2022 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers](#).
- The Victorian State Government, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing page on [People with a disability in Victoria](#).
- [The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#).
- [Productivity Commission Report on Government Services](#).

Some interesting facts are shared below:

There is estimated over **5.5 million Australians** who have a disability⁴.



18.4% of Victorians are living with a disability⁵.

An estimated **6% of Victorians** have a profound or severe disability.

4 [Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2022 | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#).

5 [Victorian State Government, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, People with a disability in Victoria](#).

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Keeping track of election commitments

Political parties release election platforms in the lead up to an election which provide a series of position statements on a range of issues. You could consider creating an internal election tracker (like the one below) comparing various party platforms and candidate responses to your key asks to inform your advocacy efforts moving forward.

Issue	Party C commitment or response	Party C commitment or response	Party C commitment or response
Issue #1 – Example: Increasing funding for the Victorian disability advocacy sector	Add your notes here	Add your notes here	Add your notes here
Issue #2 – Example: Addressing service gaps between the NDIS and mainstream services	Add your notes here	Add your notes here	Add your notes here
Issue #3	Add your notes here	Add your notes here	Add your notes here
Issue #4	Add your notes here	Add your notes here	Add your notes here

Advocacy activities

Writing a letter/email to your local Member of Parliament (MP) and local candidates (from other parties)

When writing a letter to your local MP and other local candidates, keep the following in mind:

- Include your return address to ensure you receive a response.
- Personalise the letter. For example, adding the local MP's or local candidates name, highlighting common issues/areas of interest you know they are also passionate about and including some local context to show your organisations connection to the local community.
- Clearly articulate the problem. Choose 1–3 key points you would like to share. Prioritise which issues you would like to bring to their attention first.
- Share some evidence of the problem and who it is likely to impact.
- State your purpose for writing the letter/call to action clearly so they know what you are 'asking' them to do.
- Share your proposed solution and indicate whether there is evidence of community support.
- Reiterate your call to action.

Remember to always use respectful, solution focused language in your writing.

Meeting with your local politicians

The lead up to State elections presents an ideal opportunity for your organisation to meet with your local politicians. These meetings can be an opportune way to start building a personal relationship, share your concerns and advocate for the changes you would like to see.

When meeting with politicians, keep the following in mind

- State MPs have a very busy schedule, so check the [Parliamentary Sitting Weeks Calendar](#) to request a meeting outside of when Parliament sits.
- You may only have 30 minutes for your meeting, so preparation is key. Before you speak to your local candidate, think about one to two stories you would like to share with them. Be prepared to talk about two to three key messages you want them to hear and remember.
- You may be asked by the MPs office to submit a short brief of what discussion points you would like to cover in the meeting. Prepare some background pre-reading (no more than three pages) to give the MP some background on your issue, so that they can come prepared to answer questions about your issue.
- In the meeting, use your time carefully. Start with introducing yourself or your group, be clear about the problem and what commitments you would like them to make. Also leave time for the MP or candidate to ask any questions they may have.
- Be concise, clear and focused about why you are meeting with them.
- Approach the meeting in a collaborative and constructive manner and focus on positive relationship building.

Using social media campaigns and engaging with local and state media


Social media can be a powerful tool for advocacy. Likewise, engagement with local and state media can be useful in sharing lived experience stories and raising the volume on issues important to you.

When both using social media and engaging with the media, remember to always keep your messages short and to the point, use engaging visuals, text or imaging to grab attention and always include a realistic call to action which tells people how to get involved with your advocacy.

It is also very important to ensure that your advocacy remains about your advocacy messages and does not slip into the terrain of telling people who to vote for.

There are rules and guidelines for sharing something that is considered 'electoral campaign material'. For further guidance, please see information provided by

- [Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission](#)
- [Victorian Electoral Commission](#)



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Suggested timelines for activity

The following is a simple example timeline for advocacy activities your organisation can undertake in the lead up to November.

6–9 months before (March to April)

- Mapping relevant stakeholders and candidates in your districts (This can include current MPs, relevant shadow and government ministers etc).
- Identify your organisations priority issues.
- Connect with other advocacy organisations within the sector to discuss priorities and how best to amplify your advocacy efforts. Please contact DARU to discuss opportunities for connection and collaboration across the sector.

3–6 months before (May to August)

- Develop your election platform (see section above).
- Consider what advocacy outreach/activities are appropriate for your organisation.
- Start booking in-person meetings with candidate or State part officials/policy team staff.
- You could consider developing briefing packs tailored for
 - Local candidates which would include electorate specific data and stories about localised issues.
 - Statewide party policy teams which would include key messaging around systemic reforms, funding asks or legislative changes you are proposing.
- Consider hosting a community forum to discuss issues and test potential election asks more broadly with relevant community members and stakeholders.

2–3 months before (September to October)

- Continue to engage with candidates in-person and/or online. You could consider creating an internal election tracker for your organisation to keep track of and compare party and candidate responses to your key asks to inform your advocacy efforts moving forward.
- Support people with disability to share their lived experience and amplify their stories through your social media.

Final month and post-election (November to February)

- Push final key messages through media and digital channels.
- Respond as quickly as possible to announcements if appropriate.
- After the election, send congratulations letters to winning candidates and start to request meetings with the aim to discuss implementation of election commitments.
- Take some time to review your advocacy efforts over the election year to understand what worked and didn't so you can be better prepared for the next election cycle.



T1, Level 15/150 Lonsdale St Melbourne VIC 3000

Phone (03) 9639 5807

Email admin@daru.org.au

Web www.daru.org.au

Twitter @daruVIC