



Strategic Plan

2021 – 2023

Adopted by the Sage Advocacy Board of Directors on June 17th 2021

Foreword

The events of 2020 have affected our world in many ways and against this context, we in Sage Advocacy, decided it was timely to review our most recent strategic plan. This document restates our ambitions towards delivering on our main object to *promote, protect and defend the rights and dignity of vulnerable adults, older people and healthcare patients.*

This latest strategy represents the next stage in our development as we seek to grow and improve under the six themes: independent advocacy, the people we represent, systemic change, our organisation, our people, and partnerships.

Our strategy is ambitious and will stretch our organisation to, among other things, build partnerships, work with funders to develop and grow our service and continue the high standards of professionalism and governance that we have developed.

The work that Sage Advocacy delivers on has never been more important than now. The population of Ireland is ageing and more and more people are living longer and better lives. Life expectancy is high at 84.1 years for women and 80.5 years for men¹ and is comparable to the rest of Europe².

At the same time, the most recent Census saw an 8% increase in the numbers of people declaring a disability and an estimated 64,141 people in Ireland are living with dementia, a figure that is expected to increase to 150,131 by 2045 according to the Health Service Executive (HSE)³.

Against the backdrop of these trends, the slow pace of implementation of reforming laws and policies means that we can say that it is likely that a growing number of people may be at risk of being denied the right to autonomy and self-determination and being denied the right to fully participate in their community, without adequate support to do so.

We also understand the role that poverty and low income can play in putting people into vulnerable situations. There is clear evidence that health outcomes among older persons vary according to social class⁴. Research being completed into the cost of disability by Indecon International Consultants, on behalf of the Department of Social Protection, will be all the more important as Ireland faces up to the economic impact of Covid-19.

¹ Department of Health (2019) Health in Ireland: *Key Trends 2019* [Online] available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f1bb64-health-in-ireland-key-trends-2019/>

² Committee on the Future of Healthcare Sláintecare Report. May 2017

³ <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/olderpeople/dementia/about-dementia/dementia-stats/>

⁴ Committee on the Future of Healthcare Sláintecare Report. May 2017

As a result of our work, Sage Advocacy is uniquely placed to play a significant role in developing, promoting and delivering support and independent advocacy. Our work gives us a unique perspective on the central issues affecting the rights, autonomy and participation of the people we represent.

We work with and on behalf of people who are often fighting to navigate their way through health, social care and other systems of public and private provision. Sage Advocacy seeks to support the person to have his or her voice heard, to ensure their participation in decisions about their own lives, while these decisions are being made, and to support people to complain or seek redress when these efforts have failed.

As part of our overall mission, Sage Advocacy also seeks to effect systemic change, in the public interest. We do this, through utilising the experience derived from our advocacy case work to positively engage with policy makers, legislators and decision-makers at local, regional and national level.

If Sage Advocacy is sometimes required, in line with its mission, to “speak truth to power”, it also sometimes has to speak truth to the powerless. That truth is not always palatable.

We are encouraged by what has been achieved so far. However, knowing how much we have yet to do, we now commit ourselves to realising the many important objectives set out in this Strategic Plan 2021 – 2023.

The Hon. Mary Laffoy

Chairperson,

Sage Advocacy

About Sage Advocacy

Sage Advocacy is an independent organisation, operating across Ireland to provide information, support and advocacy for older people and adults who may be vulnerable, be they in the community, residing in long-term care or healthcare patients. Sage Advocacy seeks to promote social inclusion, equality and social justice in all aspects of our work.

Sage Advocacy defines independent advocacy as the process of supporting people to make and communicate decisions and to participate in decisions about their lives, such as access to finances, accessing services, planning ahead, desire to move residence, issues relating to abuse or neglect and barriers to decision-making. We are independent of service providers as well as of the family of the person and we see our role as the practice of consulting with the person themselves to ascertain their will and preference and endeavouring to communicate those wishes.

It is a fact of life that some adults will find themselves at risk. While thousands of adults receive care at home, with family members acting as a principal carer, more still receive care in a variety of residential care settings. It must be acknowledged that though many care-givers discharge their responsibilities conscientiously and to the best of their abilities, this does not guarantee that the rights, will and preference of the individual is front and centre.

Sage Advocacy's central message and guiding principle is that the care of, and consultation with, vulnerable adults is a matter of recognising and vindicating their rights. The rights belong to them and are not concessions in the exclusive gift of others. Our work is focused on the identification and articulation of a person's individual rights and the provision of support and guidance for those who may need help in having their rights vindicated.

Sage Advocacy uses the experience of its independent advocacy and seeks to address the systemic issues we see through our work. Sage Advocacy engages with policy makers, civil society partners and all forms of media to raise awareness about systemic issues in the public interest. Of particular relevance to the work of Sage Advocacy are matters relating to decision - making capacity, safeguarding, equal access to state supports and services and the right to choose where to live.

Sage Advocacy employs a team of committed and skilled staff, who operate regionally around Ireland and who are trained and supported to address the most complex support and advocacy challenges. Where possible and as necessary, Sage Advocacy involves volunteers with specialist skills and/or significant life experience in support of work with clients.

Sage Advocacy has developed a policy entitled "Quality Standards for Support and Advocacy Work". We use these standards to guide us in our work, providing us with the tools we need to ensure that we deliver a high-quality, person-centred, independent and accountable advocacy service to those who need it the most.

The 6 Quality Standards of our advocacy work are

1. Respect

Reflecting the right of every person in regard to dignity and respect, including each individual's right to privacy, confidentiality and self-determination.

2. Social Justice

Promoting equal treatment with other people in respect of access to basic goods, services and protections and a positive affirmation of social solidarity

3. Competence & Compassion

Demonstrating high levels of skill, competency, compassion and consistency on the part of advocates

4. Accessibility

Available in a manner that is convenient and easily accessible to people who require support.

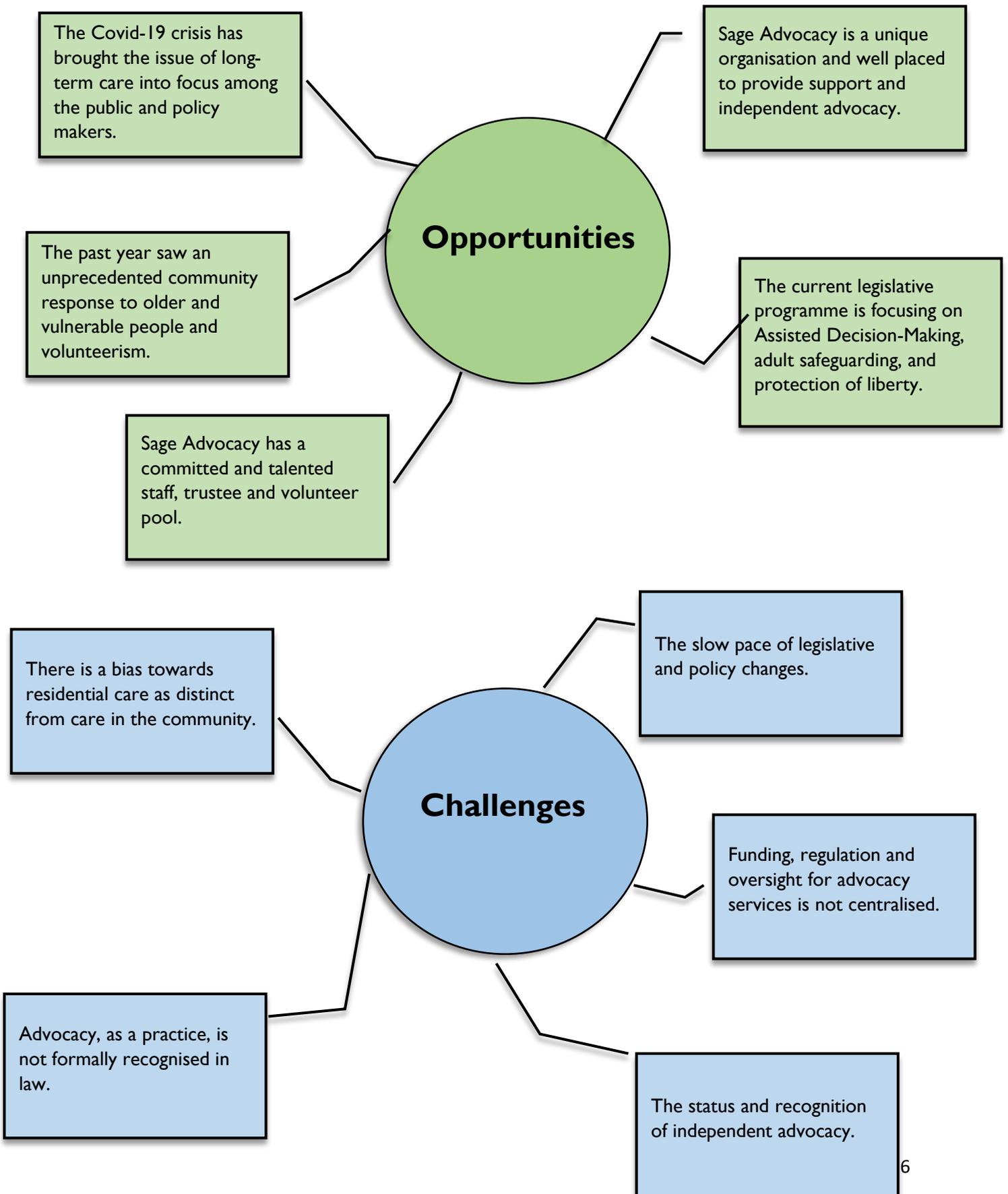
5. Independence

Structurally, operationally and psychologically independent from health and social care service providers and representing only the will and preferences of people receiving support.

6. Responsibility and Accountability

Acting with integrity and responsibility and engaging with people who use the service and with other stakeholders in an honest and transparent manner

Opportunities & Challenges



About our Strategic Plan

This Strategic Plan revises the Sage Advocacy *Statement of Strategy 2018 - 2023* and sets out how Sage Advocacy will respond to the support and advocacy needs of vulnerable adults, older people and healthcare patients in Irish society over the next three years (2021-2023).

This Strategic Plan will feed into annual operational plans and will guide and influence the development of our relationships and interactions with the people we represent, current and potential funders, stakeholders and partner organisations.

How will we measure the success of our Strategic Plan?

Sage Advocacy will develop annual operational plans, which will set specific and measurable targets, based on this strategy, for the year ahead.

Sage Advocacy will also develop annual financial plans, performance & development frameworks for employees and systems for examining impact and outcomes.

The Sage Advocacy board of directors will receive a progress report from the Executive at every board meeting and will examine progress being made on achieving our operational goals twice a year.

The Sage Advocacy annual report will be developed to reflect the progress made under each of our strategic priorities and all information contained therein such as data, case studies and qualitative analysis will reflect progress made towards our goals.

The Strategic Plan is centred around 6 themes;

Theme 1	Independent advocacy / Case work
Theme 2	The people we represent
Theme 3	Systemic change
Theme 4	Our organisation
Theme 5	Our people
Theme 6	Partnerships

Theme 1 - Independent Advocacy

Objective

To be the standard-bearer of independent advocacy.

Key Results

1. Revise Sage Advocacy's 'quality standards' including a stakeholder consultation and research into current and best practices.
2. Conduct annual revision of service policies and procedures to ensure our advocacy approaches are up to date and consistently applied.
3. Develop a process to measure the impact of our case advocacy and conduct a sample review of case-work.
4. Deliver a responsive independent advocacy information and support service to meet the information needs of people who contact us.
5. Initiation of conversations with key partners on adopting national standards for advocacy e.g. Citizens Information Board (CIB), Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA).
6. Develop a business plan for the development of independent advocacy in all 6 Sláintecare health regions and present to the HSE.
7. Develop a communications strategy to campaign for a National Council for Advocacy and make submissions to key Departments in Social Protection, Justice, Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and Health.
8. Use our independent advocacy work to influence and raise public awareness.

Theme 2 - The people we represent

Objective

We take an innovative approach to ensure the participation of the people we represent in our work.

Key Results

1. Develop a 'stakeholder' map and an engagement plan for each stakeholder.
2. Research and produce a Sage Advocacy document on the active participation of the people we represent in our policy design, systemic work, communications and media.
3. Establish stakeholder forums to communicate key messages and hear issues.
4. Develop a panel of national and regional spokespeople to address the public and the media.
5. Adopt a Plain English policy and approach to all of our external communications.
6. Develop in-house style guide for Sage Advocacy communications.

Theme 3 - Systemic Advocacy

Objective

To identify and challenge systemic issues concerned with the equal treatment and the protection of the rights of the people we represent.

Key Results

1. Be seen as an authority and be referenced by policymakers on issues such as adult safeguarding, supporting decision-making and protection of liberty.
2. Produce a 'key campaigns' action plan in relation to systemic issues.
3. Develop a rights-based / values-driven external communications plan.
4. Produce and launch relevant and evidence-based position papers.
5. Be 'at the table' of key consultative forums and committees across relevant government departments, not limited to matters relating to health.
6. Develop an evaluation system to assess the outcomes of our systemic work.
7. Engage in specific projects at national and European level.

Theme 4 – Our organisation

Objective

To be a lean organisation and excellently governed.

Key Results

1. Full compliance with the requirements of:
 - a. the Charities Act 2009; and
 - b. the Companies Act 2014.
2. Produce and comply with a Governance Journal and Compliance and Review Calendar
3. Develop an income diversity strategy to identify funding opportunities.
4. Ensure we have sufficient facilities to deliver our service and move towards a hybrid workplace, combining remote work with office work, for all staff.
5. Develop organisational values statement and ensure a values-based approach to our work through a values into practice committee.
6. Ensure the learning from the Independent Complaints Review Panel is incorporated through an annual report to the board and executive.
7. Conduct a 'Share of Voice' analysis to assess the impact of Sage Advocacy on key issues.⁵
8. Make a commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and join Coalition 2030.



⁵ Share of voice (SOV) is a measure of your performance compared to your competitors.

Theme 5 – Our people

Objective

To be a 'great place to work' and attract, retain and develop talented and committed staff, trustees and volunteers.

Key Results

1. Promote work/life balance and staff well-being through revision of policies, staff mentoring and support.
2. Conduct a workforce and board analysis which addresses diversity, gender balance and succession planning.
3. A peer-support system is adopted and used by Sage Advocacy advocates.
4. Skill-map the 'specialist skills' required from volunteers and develop a volunteer strategy with at least 2 volunteers per skill area such as law, social work, nursing, medicine, mental health, regulation, mediation, safeguarding, policing, policy, research, media.
5. Revise the staff performance review system and produce annual development plan for each staff member.
6. Ensure staff have access to information they need about their employment with Sage Advocacy, including an annual rewards statement.
7. Regularly review and compare terms and conditions with industry norms with a commitment to never pay below the living wage.
8. Progressively increase our development, mentoring and training budget per annum, to 3% by 2023.

Theme 6 - Partnerships

Objective

We forge strong and meaningful partnerships with organisations with complementary visions and similar values.

Key Results

1. Build partnerships with all organisations involved in the care of older people and vulnerable adults.
2. Ensure a positive working relationship with the HSE through quarterly meetings and regular engagement.
3. Develop critical friendships and meet regularly with existing partners to raise systemic issues e.g. Safeguarding Ireland, National Safeguarding Office of the HSE, Decision Support Service, National Advocacy Service, Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission, National Disability Authority, the Legal Aid Board, an Garda Síochána and HIQA.
4. Develop European and international partnerships.
5. Build new collaborations with civil society organisations with missions in common.
6. Build relationships with academic partners to conduct research.
7. Contribute to an Observatory on Care and to the Commission on Care, once established under the aegis of the Department of Health.

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