

Developing an effective professional advocacy workforce to support seniors' rights

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The Project

This project explored advocacy professional development and the skills, competencies, and training required to work as an effective advocate for the Older Person's Advocacy Network (OPAN).

What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is a process of standing up for the rights of another person, or yourself. An advocate generally promotes the rights or best interests of another person or group, and many professions act as advocates in the course of their work, including lawyers, human service workers, and union officials [1].

Why is Advocacy important?

Advocacy is important for people who are potentially vulnerable in our society, including older people, people with disabilities and their carers. It has strong links with the human rights movement and the concept of empowerment, as empowerment is associated with relationships of unequal power and powerlessness [2]. It aims to increase control over goods and services, overcome barriers that restrict opportunities, ensure appropriate societal and service deliver responses, protect human rights, ensure a better quality of life, emphasise individual needs and wishes, challenge stereotypes and stigma, and aim for empowerment of disadvantaged individuals and groups [3]. Advocacy aims to build the capacity of individuals and communities to solve their own problems, empowering them and reducing the need for service intervention [4].

Methodology

The mixed-method research design included a scoping literature review, six focus groups with 41 OPAN advocates around Australia, and an online workforce survey (Curtin Human Research Ethics Committee approval HRE2019-0098).



Scoping Literature Review

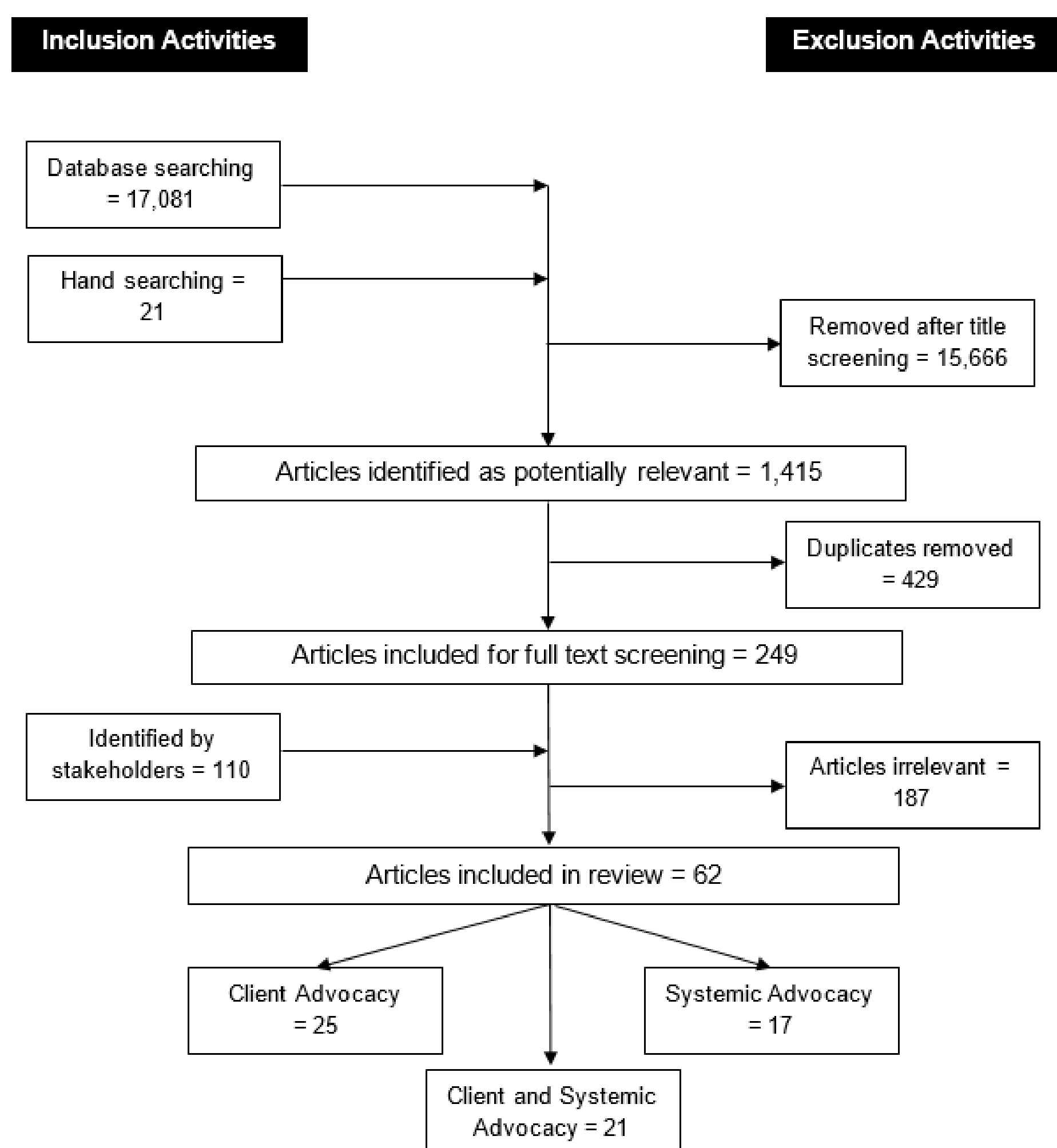


Figure 1. PRISMA diagram outlining inclusion and exclusion activities for the scoping literature review

Scoping Review Findings [5]

Thirty-nine advocacy skills and 37 different competencies for advocates were identified in the scoped literature. It was identified that both theoretical and contextual knowledge are important when considering training needs. The scoping review highlighted three different types of training for advocates: training for professional advocates, students, and family members. Thirteen different training programs for professional advocates were identified in the literature, along with a number of programs for family members and students. None of the professional advocate training was specifically focussed on aged care and older person advocacy.

A gap in training focussed on the area of aged care and older person advocacy was identified.

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Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted with advocates from six OPAN service delivery organisations around Australia and included 41 advocates and 3 students, as shown in Figure 2. Several advocates at one location participated online.

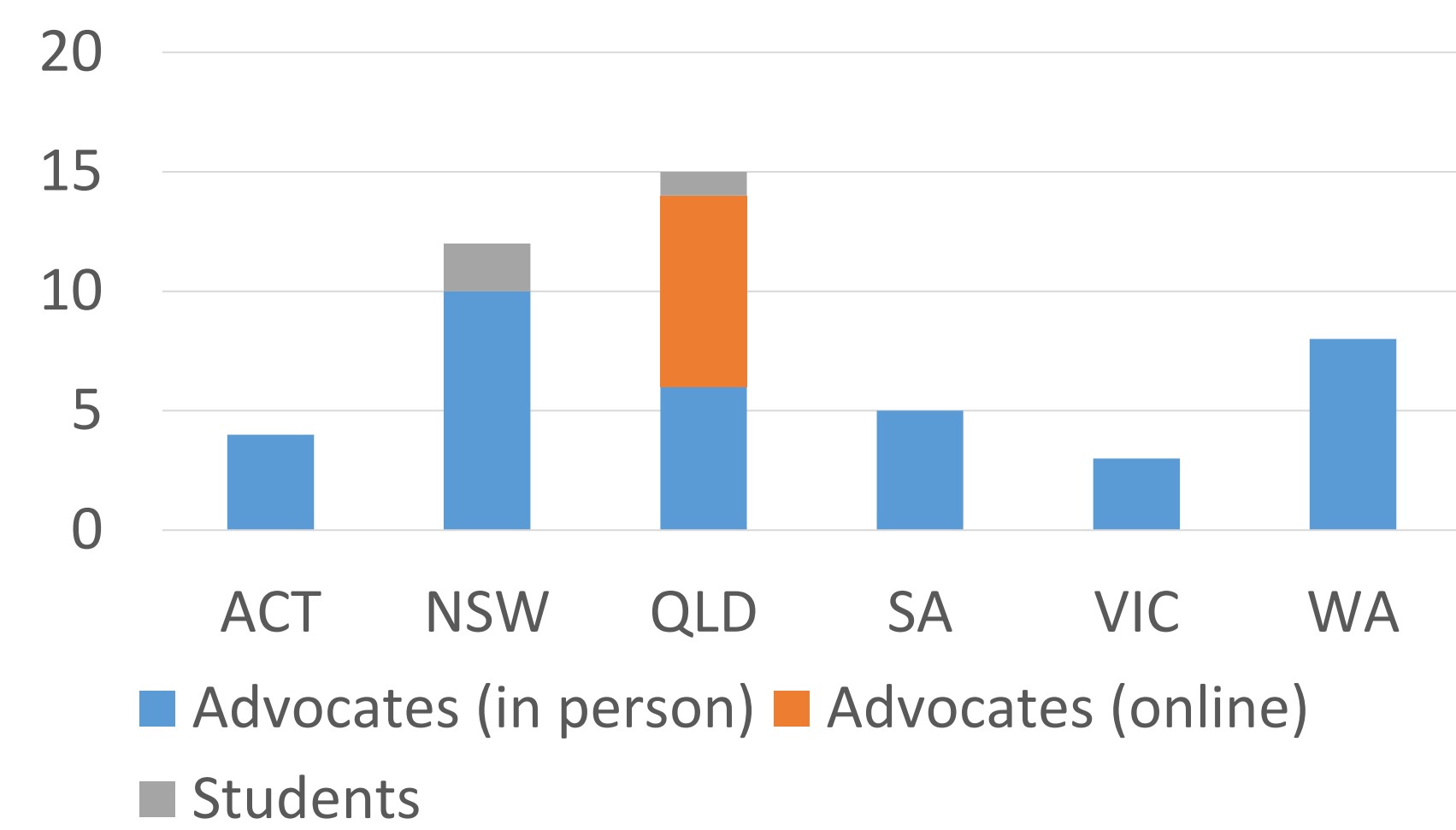


Figure 2: Participant numbers by location (n=44)

Focus group findings – knowledge, skills, and values for advocacy [6]

The focus groups identified a number of perceived areas of knowledge, skills and values and necessary for advocacy, listed below in Table 3.

Table 3. Knowledge, Skills and Values for Advocacy identified by focus group participants

Knowledge		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rights-based advocacy principles and processes Understanding of advocacy role Client group Socio-political environment Disability Elder abuse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government processes and priorities Human rights Individual and group interventions Intersectionality Legislation, standards and conventions Legal documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local resources Service's operational role, policies, and processes Relevant sectors/ services systems Societal oppression and intergenerational trauma Systems change principles Types and models of advocacy
Skills		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis and research skills Approachability Assertiveness Assessment Computer literacy Confidence Conflict resolution Problem-solving Stress management Counselling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviewing Critical reflection emotional intelligence self-awareness Cultural sensitivity Flexibility Public speaking Interpersonal communication Leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lobbying Mediation Negotiation Facilitation Networking Organisation Perseverance Resourcefulness Social justice principles
Values		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sense of humour Empathy and compassion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reliability Transparency Professional integrity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Person-centred practice Non-judgemental

Online Survey

The 62 question online survey was developed as informed by the scoping literature review and focus groups, in liaison with OPAN, and is currently open and collecting responses. The survey will provide baseline data about the aged care advocacy workforce across Australia, identifying relevant, skills, knowledge, and competencies, and professional development needs and options. The survey will close in mid-November and total project reporting is due at the end of March 2020.

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