



## GUIDELINES FOR ADVOCACY

### What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is the process of standing alongside an individual who is disadvantaged, and speaking out on their behalf in a way that represents the best interests of that person. The aim of advocacy is to bring about beneficial outcomes in a way that enables each client to retain as much control as possible over how it is carried out. An advocate may provide information and advice in order to assist a person to take action to resolve their own concerns, or may take a more active role in representing the persons rights to another person or organisation.

### Why would I need an Advocate?

People need advocates for all sorts of reasons. Many clients can successfully advocate on their own behalf, however there are some people who may experience difficulty speaking up for themselves. In these instances, an advocate may:

- Assist the client to access services
- Assist the client to change services
- Ensure that the service chosen is appropriate
- Communicate with the service provider
- Negotiate suitable resolutions where a complaint or dispute has arisen.

### Who can be an advocate?

Advocacy is the process of standing alongside an individual who is disadvantaged, and speaking out on their behalf in a way that represents the best interests of that person. If a client of our agency has asked you to be their advocate, this means they would like you to act on their behalf. You may be a family member or friend of the person, or a member of an advocacy service.

*Clients and prospective advocates should be aware that interpreters cannot be used as advocates, as they have a distinct role to play in interpreting communication between two or more parties.*

### Responsibilities as an advocate for a service user

Being an advocate may involve a number of aspects including, but not limited to:

- your attendance or involvement during assessments and reviews of the client's personalised plan;
- acting as a representative to communicate or negotiate with us on behalf of the client regarding access to their personal information;
- Aid with lodging a complaint or feedback;
- Any issue regarding our service performance.

We ask our clients to complete a **Nomination of Support Person/Advocate Form** when they wish to nominate or change their advocate. Clients are free to change their advocates whenever they wish, however a new notification form must be completed with each change.





## Definitions

<u>Advocate</u>	An advocate is a person who, with explicit authority, represents another person's interests.
<u>Informal Advocate</u>	A friend or family member who is nominated by a client as their personal advocate. This is more like a support person.
<u>Systems Advocate</u>	An organisation or professional advocate who can act for a disadvantaged individual or group of individuals in an institutional setting.
<u>Legal Advocate</u>	A nominated advocate whose role has legal status, for example holding and Enduring Power of Attorney.

## The role of an advocate explained

Advocacy may involve speaking, acting or writing on behalf of an individual (or group) who has limited ability to exercise his/her rights. Advocacy is a mechanism to facilitate client rights, and you may be requested to support the client in exercising his/her rights. Examples of rights you could be asked to support include:

- The right to privacy and confidentiality;
- The right to respect and dignity;
- The right to quality services;
- The right to information to inform decision making;
- The right to choice and control;
- The right to make and resolve complaints;
- The right to non-discriminatory service; and
- The right to protection of legal and human rights, and freedom from abuse and neglect.

Advocacy differs from mediation and negotiation. Mediation and negotiation processes aim to reach a mutually acceptable outcome between parties. The role of the advocate is not impartial, as he or she has an obligation to operate entirely from the perspective of the service user in negotiating an outcome. Advocacy is concerned with genuine major needs, and aims to protect the interests and welfare of the client.

The advocacy perspective is specialized and quite distinct from the service provider perspective. Advocates and advocacy organisations can often stand in contradiction to the system in terms of attitudes towards people in need and beliefs regarding how best to serve them. Effective advocates strive for independence and to minimize conflict of interest. It is therefore inappropriate that interpreters accept the advocacy role, as their interpreting responsibilities do not permit the necessary independence required of an advocate. Advocacy may involve a degree of conflict with





service providers and other authorities and therefore may be costly in terms of emotional stress and other similar demands.

## Access to Personal Information

At times during your role as an advocate you may need to access the client's personal information. Centacare regard the privacy and confidentiality of every client's personal details as paramount, and as such, there are strict procedures around accessing this information.

If you feel there is a reason for you to access the client's personal information, please speak to the assigned coordinator who will inform you of the process, and explain when and where access to this information is appropriate.

Thank you for agreeing to act as an advocate for one of our valued clients.

## Checklist for advocates

As an advocate of a client, we ask you to be aware of the following and to ensure that:

- The client has given **written permission** for you to act on his or her behalf;
- You inform us that you are acting as the client's advocate;
- You always act in the best interests of the client;
- The client is aware of any issues and developments in relation to services they receive and which you, as their advocate, may be involved in;
- The client is kept informed of any developments in relation to the issues/s where you are representing their interests, and that any decisions will be made by the client;
- You encourage the client to provide feedback to you about the services they are receiving;
- You advise the service about any changes in client circumstances and any concerns about changing client needs;
- You are prepared to relinquish the role of advocate should the client wish this;
- You avoid representing them in circumstances where there may be a conflict of interest; and
- You do not act as an interpreter for the client while acting in an advocacy role.





## Further Information

For further information on advocacy, please refer to one or more of the following agencies:

### **Queensland Advocacy Incorporated (QAI)**

Phone: (07) 3236 1122

Fax: (07) 3236 1590

Email: [qai@qai.org.au](mailto:qai@qai.org.au)

### **Public Advocate**

Phone: (07) 3224 7424

Fax: (07) 3224 7364

Email: [public.advocate@justice.qld.gov.au](mailto:public.advocate@justice.qld.gov.au)

### **Capricorn Citizen's Advocacy Inc.**

118 George Street, Rockhampton

Phone: 07 4922 0299

### **Queensland Aged and Disability Advocacy**

Phone: 1800 818 338

Fax: 07 4927 9411

Email: [info@qada.org.au](mailto:info@qada.org.au)

### **Queensland Parents for People with a Disability Inc**

Phone: (07) 3875 2101

