

P.S.

Connecting with people who lived in institutions in Victoria.

Advocacy

Advocacy in general is an action that speaks in favour of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of an individual or others. However at VALID we see our role as standing beside people empowering them to be their own advocate.

Advocacy is something that everybody can and must do, including:

- People with disabilities
- Family members of people with disabilities
- Friends of people with disability
- Support staff and service providers
- Support coordinators
- Community members
- Journalists
- Politicians

Everyone has the right to make decisions and the support to do this will look different depending on the decisions to be made and based on their individuals support needs.

There are many forms of advocacy including:

- Self -Advocacy, where people with disabilities speak up on their own behalf
- Informal Advocacy (such as done by families for their family member)
- Individual advocacy as done by Support Coordinators, managers and staff
- Professional individual Advocacy (see next paragraph)
- Systemic advocacy is where people/organisations work to change systems and policies



What is Individual Advocacy?

“Individual advocacy is when a professional advocate supports a person with a particular problem. An individual advocate either supports a person one-to-one or supports them to advocate for themselves. The advocate will support someone with an issue they’ve not been able to solve on their own. An individual advocate must be independent, (from and independent organisation) only be on the side of the person with disability, and only represent their interests.”

The federal, state and territory governments fund independent disability advocacy. Funded advocates work with people who have problems about the NDIS and other issues including problems with the justice system, child protection, homelessness, guardianship, etc.

What Individual Advocacy is not...

- **Permanent** – individual advocacy is for solving short-term issues of abuse, neglect or exploitation and not a solution for the absence of ongoing supported decision-making;
- **A substitute** – advocates will not and cannot do what others should be doing (e.g. Support Coordinators, legally-appointed guardians);
- **A decision-maker** – advocates cannot make decisions that only legally-appointed decision-makers must make under the law (e.g. VCAT appointed guardians, NDIS Nominees)

What can Statutory bodies do?

Independent statutory bodies like the Victorian Office of the Public Advocate (OPA), provide last resort independent advocacy where there is no family members or friends who are able or willing to assist someone with decision-making. These decisions often include critical life decisions including housing, medical choices, financial and service provision.

Individual advocacy provided by an independent disability advocacy organisation is only one part of the advocacy pie! There are a lot of ways that are important to making sure that people can access the advocacy they need and support with resolving complaints over the long-term.

- Independent self-advocacy groups
- Family advocacy
- Complaints bodies
- Information and more...
- Volunteer decision-making programs
- Statutory bodies
- Training

Resources

Where can you find an Advocate?

- www.valid.org.au
- <https://disabilityadvocacyfinder.dss.gov.au/disability/ndap/>
- <https://askizzy.org.au/>



Office of the Public Advocate (OPA) www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au/