

PRINCIPLES OF DISABILITY ADVOCACY

**“Nothing
about us
without us”**



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About DARU

The Disability Advocacy Resource Unit (DARU) was established in 2007 and is funded by the Victorian Government. It is run by a governance group, which includes members of Disability Advocacy Victoria Inc. and the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS).

DARU is unique in Australia as a dedicated resource unit funded to work with disability advocacy organisations to promote and protect the rights of people with disability. DARU develops resources and provides training and professional development opportunities to keep disability advocates informed and up-to-date about issues affecting people with disability in Victoria.

Introduction

The aim of this document is to provide a useful starting point for discussion within advocacy organisations for developing rights based policies and procedures. This document replaces the *Disability Advocacy Code of Conduct* that was developed in 2011.

Why the change from ‘code’ to ‘principles’?

During the process of reviewing ‘The Code’ in 2017, the review committee felt that the term ‘code’ implied that the principles outlined in this document related to a compulsory compliance scheme or standard. The principles are not mandatory but rather, present an agreed framework to promote consistency across disability advocacy organisations.

These principles acknowledge organisational autonomy and diversity across the advocacy sector while identifying ethical principles that underpin effective advocacy practice and state the goals of disability advocacy.

Disability advocates, disability advocacy organisations and their committees of management/boards, are provided with a clear framework for understanding their responsibilities and accountabilities.

The principles of advocacy recognise that:

- Disability advocates are skilled professionals working to promote and uphold the rights of people with disability within a human rights framework.
- Advocacy organisations play an important role in protecting and improving the lives and rights of people with disability by bringing to public attention the issues affecting people with disabilities.
- Committees of management and board members are accountable for the process of decision making which ensures the overall direction, effectiveness, efficiency, and responsiveness carried out by their respective disability advocacy organisation.



Goals of Disability Advocacy

Disability advocacy works to ensure that rights are promoted and protected so that people with disability can fully participate in the community. This is done by:

Promoting and upholding the human rights of people with disability.

Empowering people with disability to make decisions affecting their lives.

Honouring and valuing the lived experience of people with disability.

Promoting inclusiveness and accessibility by identifying and addressing barriers.

Addressing and preventing discrimination by educating others about the rights of people with disability.



Key Principles of Best Practice Advocacy

To achieve the advocacy goals, disability advocates should strive for the following in their work:

1. Act with integrity

- Be independent.
- Understand the importance of privacy and confidentiality.
- Declare conflicts of interest.
- Use evidence-based approaches.

2. Use a person-directed approach

- Ensure that the voice of the person is heard.
- Foster self advocacy and empower the person to have a voice wherever possible.
- Identify the person's strengths and use these to maximise their contribution and involvement in establishing advocacy goals.
- Consider a person's whole of life situation by understanding their existing relationships with friends, family, service providers and other networks.
- Be proactive in partnering with existing networks (where appropriate) to achieve the best possible outcomes for the agreed advocacy goals.
- Address all forms of discrimination, create access and promote inclusiveness and respect for diversity.

3. Maximise communication

- Recognise, acknowledge and respond to diverse communication needs.
- Be aware of technology or communication platforms that can assist communication and best practice advocacy.
- Use language that promotes positive perceptions and empowerment.
- When representing a person, make sure you respect their preferences for how they wish to be represented.

4. Know the legislative context

Disability advocates should be aware of all the legislative tools available to assist them in their work as these provide the framework of rights for people with disability. This includes the following Acts:

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006
- Privacy Act 1988 (Cmth)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cmth)
- National Standards for Disability Services
- National Disability and Insurance Scheme Act 2013 (Cmth)
- Disability Amendment Act 2012 – DHS Service Providers (Vic)
- Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic)
- Health Records Act 2001 (Vic)
- Information Privacy Act 2000 (Vic)
- Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic) – This contains an agreed set of human rights, freedoms and responsibilities protected by law
- Quality Framework for Disability Services in Victoria 2007
- Other relevant commonwealth and state laws, policies and procedures

This list was compiled in 2018. Any changes or updates to this list will be added to the online version of this publication on the DARU website.



Key Principles for Disability Advocacy Organisations

To achieve the advocacy goals, disability advocacy organisations should strive for the following in their service delivery:

1. Be responsive

Disability advocacy organisations should demonstrate responsiveness by:

- Providing high quality services to people with disability in a prompt and professional manner, and in accordance with relevant policies
- Identifying and promoting a best practice approach. This involves adopting appropriate strategies, methods and processes that lead to improved outcomes for people with disability.
- Applying knowledge and expertise to deliver a high quality service and identifying opportunities to improve service outcomes.
- Accessing alternative or complementary sources of counsel, advice or service when necessary.

2. Show leadership

Disability advocacy organisations should demonstrate leadership by:

- Advancing the rights of people with disability
- Providing a positive influence
- Inspiring and empowering others

- Actively implementing, promoting and supporting advocacy values
- Acting in an ethical manner
- Working with or on behalf of people with disabilities to respond to identified needs
- Ensuring policies and procedures are implemented
- Recognising that disability intersects with other identities (such as cultural, gender, sexuality) to create welcoming, accessible services

3. Be accountable

Disability advocacy organisations should have documented processes that will ensure good governance, leadership and management, including:

- A clear mission or values statement
- A description of the programs and services provided, measurable program goals and objectives, and clear communication of what service users can expect from the organisation
- Clear advocacy principles
- A statement of the organisation's planning and policy directions
- Robust systems for finance, accounting, risk management, occupational health and safety, employment practices, confidentiality and privacy
- Policies that cover:
 - Roles and responsibilities of the board, board members, the CEO and staff
 - Inclusive participation and service users' rights
 - Conflicts of interest
 - Grievances and complaints
 - Meeting and decision-making processes
 - Publicity and media contact
 - Partnership and referral arrangements.



Key Advocacy Principles for Members of Committees of Management and Boards

Members of committees of management and boards are accountable for the governance and activities carried out by their organisation and must:

- Respond to the needs of people with disability and disability advocates
- Act in the best interests of the organisation
- Act with honesty and integrity
- Act fairly and impartially
- Be open and transparent in their dealings
- Identify and acknowledge where a conflict of interest exists
- Respect the confidentiality of information
- Support paid and unpaid staff
- Be proactive in identifying issues of concern
- Be accountable for decisions made
- Uphold legislation relating to human rights.



More information

Visit the DARU website

for more information about
disability advocacy at
www.daru.org.au.



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