

ADVOCACY POLICY



Purpose

Aurora Support Services is committed to promoting and upholding participants' right to speak up and express themselves, and recognises the important role that advocacy can play in achieving this. Effective advocacy ensures human and legal rights of people with disability are promoted and protected so they are empowered to fully participate in the community.

The purpose of this policy is to establish a framework by which Aurora Support Services respects and promotes participant's rights to speak up for themselves, supports participants to understand their rights, and responsibilities advocates on behalf of participants where necessary, and also facilitates their access to external advocates.

Scope

This policy applies to all employees, students, volunteers, contractors and members of the Committee of Management of Aurora Support Services.

This policy is relevant to all participants who attend Aurora Support Services as well as to their family members and any other supports who may interact with Aurora Support Services on their behalf.

Definitions

Self-advocacy	Speaking up for yourself about your rights, your needs and the things that are important to you.
Advocacy	Getting support from another person to help you express your views and wishes, and help you stand up for your rights.

Finding an Advocate

Participants can contact People with Disability Australia for advocacy support:

People with Disability Australia

Phone – 1800 422 015

Website - <https://pwd.org.au/get-help/individual-advocacy/>

Or participants can contact the following organisations or access their 'Find an Advocate' databases to find and access an advocate of their choosing:

Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability (VALID)

Phone – (03) 9416 4003

Website – <https://valid.org.au/resources-and-media/resources/list-victorian-advocacy-organisations/>

Disability Advocacy Resource Unit (DARU)

Phone – (03) 9639 5807

Website – <https://www.daru.org.au/organisation-type/individual-advocacy>



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Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA)

Website – <https://www.dana.org.au/find-an-advocate/>

North East Citizen Advocacy (NECA)

Phone – 8407 3684

Website – <https://citizenadvocacy.com.au>

Policy

Participants' Access to Advocacy

Participants' rights to self-advocacy should always be promoted and upheld; participants should always be offered the opportunity to speak about their own needs and supports, and about matters that impact them.

Participants should be afforded the opportunity to invite people of their choosing to meetings about themselves and their needs. This person might be different to a representative, such as a parent or a house supervisor, who attends participants' meetings to provide information on their behalf.

Participants and/or their families may wish to access support from an advocate at any time that they feel they may need help or support to express themselves or to speak up about their rights. An advocate may be a friend or family member, an Aurora staff member who they trust, an external staff member that they trust, or a formal/external advocate.

Program Managers and Services Directors are responsible for ensuring that participants are advised and aware of their rights to access an advocate in relation to their service, including their right to have an advocate present for any assessments, meetings and communication with the organisation. Program Managers and Services Directors may assist a participant or their family to access an advocate by providing them with the referral contact

Participants and their representatives will be reminded of their right to access an advocate's support, and the role of an advocate, when a participant is:

- Being assessed or re-assessed for services
- Being oriented to the service or program
- Being refused services
- Making a complaint or giving feedback about their service
- In any other circumstances where a staff member believes that they may benefit from advocacy support

Aurora Support Services will ensure that staff complete the 'Supported Decision Making' training module in the WDS Workforce Essentials online training platform.

Working with an Advocate or Representative

Where a participant or their family has nominated an external advocate, the relevant Program Manager or Service Director will:

- Confirm with the participant and their family what their preferences are as to which communication/s they wish for their advocate to be included in
- Ensure that the advocate knows that they have been nominated, and that they agree to this
- Record the advocate's details in the participant's Participant Profile
- Communicate and work cooperatively with the advocate
- Ensure that the identified advocate is present for all assessments and meetings requested by the participant



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- Communicate comprehensively with the advocate and involve them in the participant's care and service planning
- Ensure that the participant knows that they have the right to change their advocate at any time

Participants may also have an authorised representative, who has legal right to speak on their behalf.

Authorised representatives include:

- Guardians
- Attorneys under Enduring Powers of Attorney
- Agents under the Medical Treatment Planning and Decisions Act 2016
- Administrators under the Guardianship and Administration Act 2019
- A person otherwise authorised by participants or their family members to act or make decisions on their behalf

If an authorised representative is acting on behalf of a participant, Aurora will request evidence of their representative authority; proof will be sighted, copied and a copy placed in the participant's file.

Advocating for Participants

Advocating for our participants is an important part of our role as a disability support organisation. This may happen on a number of levels: internally, externally, societally and systemically.

Internally, all staff members at Aurora are expected to advocate for our participants by:

- Promoting and supporting participants' rights to self-advocacy
- Supporting participants to engage in pathways to speak up
- Raising complaints and concerns on participants' behalf
- Sharing information about participant's choices and preferences that have been expressed to you or observed
- Taking part in continuous improvement processes to improve the services and supports that we provide to our participants

External advocacy may include:

- Attending meetings not facilitated by Aurora Support Services (such as planning meetings or assessments) with a participant and/or their family to support them or to advocate on their behalf
- Providing written submissions for consideration at external meetings or assessments
- Supporting participants or their families to make a complaint or give feedback to an external body

Staff may advocate externally on behalf of participants when requested to do so. Any requests for an Aurora staff member to provide external advocacy support for a participant will be considered on a case-by-case basis, and will be accommodated where possible to do so, with consideration to the organisation's capacity to meet the request and whether the organisation's involvement is appropriate.

As staff members, we make a commitment to societal advocacy by promoting positive attitudes and inclusion for people with disability. This includes:

- Promoting a positive image for people with disability
- Using respectful and person-first language when referring to our participants, such as "person with a disability", "person who uses a wheelchair" and "person with autism"
- Providing education to people in the community about people with disability and their needs
- In a respectful manner, challenging negative stereotypes or disrespectful ways of speaking about or referring to people with disabilities
- Speaking up for our participants' right to access and participate in their community
- Challenging unnecessary or unjust barriers to our participants' accessing their community



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Systemic advocacy involves working for long-term social change to make sure that legislation, policies and practices support the rights and interests of our participants. As an organisation, Aurora Support Services is committed to facilitating systemic advocacy for people with disability by:

- Making complaints or providing feedback on behalf of our participants
- Joining and contributing to networking opportunities with similar organisations providing support to people with disabilities
- Joining and contributing to forums discussing issues likely to impact upon our participants,
- Participating in surveys and feedback opportunities from peak bodies and Government departments such as the NDIA

Policy Review

Document Approver	Services Directors
Date Reviewed	07 August 2024
Timeframe For Next Review	This policy is reviewed on a two-yearly basis. The policy will, however, be reviewed before this time if it is identified that changes in the legislative, policy and/or funding environment have rendered the policy no longer appropriate in its current form.
Next Review Due	07 August 2026

Policy Context

NDIS Rules and Standards	NDIS (Code of Conduct) Rules 2018 NDIS (Complaints Management and Resolution) Rules 2018 NDIS (Provider Registration and Practice Standards) Rules 2018 NDIS Practice Standards Core Module 1, Rights and Responsibilities – Independence and Informed Choices
Relevant Legislation	Disability Act 2006 NDIS Act 2013 Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 Disability Discrimination Act 1992 Disability Service Safeguard Act 2018 Equal Opportunity Act 2010 Guardianship and Administration Act 2019 Medical Treatment Planning and Decisions Act 2016
Contractual Obligations	NDIS Conditions of Registration Individual Service Agreements for NDIS Participants Individual Brokerage Agreements for DSOA Participants
Related Policies and Procedures	Code of Conduct Agreement Complaints and Complaints Management Policy Employee Professional Standards Policy Participant Rights Policy
Related Forms and Documents	National Disability Services' Zero Tolerance Framework Participant Profile Participant Information Pack



Advocacy Policy – Easy Read

Supporting Your Rights

Staff at Aurora will:



- Support your right to speak up.
- Help you share your views.
- Help you make complaints if needed.
- Listen to your choices and preferences.
- Help improve services based on your feedback.
- Speak up about your rights to be included in the community.

What is Advocacy?



Self-advocacy means speaking up for yourself.

Advocacy means someone helps you:

- Say what you want
- Understand your rights
- Stand up for yourself

Getting an Advocate



You can choose someone to help you speak up. This person is called an advocate.

Your advocate can be:

- A friend
- A family member
- A staff member you trust
- An independent (external) advocate.

You can also find an advocate through advocacy organisations.

You can ask staff to help you find an advocate.

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When you can have an Advocate



You can have an advocate at any time, including when:

- You go to meetings.
- You are being assessed.
- You start a new service.
- You are unhappy or want to complain.
- You need help to speak up.



Meetings and Decisions

You can invite someone you trust to your meetings.

You should be given the chance to speak for yourself first.

Your advocate can support you, but your voice is important.



Working with your Advocate

If you choose an advocate:

- Staff will ask how you want them involved.
- Staff will talk and work with your advocate.
- Your advocate can come to meetings if you want.

You can change your advocate at any time.

Representatives (Legal Decision Makers)

Some people may have a legal representative who can make decisions for them, such as:

- A guardian.
- Someone with power of attorney.
- A legally appointed decision-maker.

The organisation may ask for proof of this.

