



Understanding self-advocacy

Self-advocacy means understanding your rights, having the ability to speak up about the things that are important to you, and having your voice heard. It means being able to ask for what you need and want, making sure that you are listened to, and making sure you have the same choices as everyone else. Many people say that the more they practise self-advocacy the more comfortable and confident they become when faced with challenging situations.

This information sheet explores self-advocacy benefits and tips, the rights and laws to protect you, ways of making complaints, and where you can get help.

When you might need to self-advocate

You might need to self-advocate in a range of situations, including when you are:

- a patient in hospital or rehabilitation
- visiting healthcare providers (e.g. prosthetists, or allied health providers)
- changing a service provider
- looking for employment and/or in the workplace
- applying for or attending education and training
- looking for housing or supported accommodation
- in the community, travelling on public transport or shopping.

Benefits of self-advocacy

- Making decisions on your own.
- Gaining self-confidence and respect.
- Learning new ways to express your needs to achieve goals.
- Learning to work with others who can assist you (teamwork).
- Developing problem-solving skills.

Tips for effective self-advocacy

- Be an active and assertive participant in the process, but avoid being aggressive.
- Directly state (say) what your needs are in a clear, firm and polite manner.
- If you don't understand something, be sure to ask questions.
- Take time to listen to others, and respect their point of view.
- Get enough information to make informed choices.
- If you feel you are not being heard, consider putting your request in writing.
- Take notes when you attend meetings and during phone calls, so you can refer to these in the future.
- Make sure that anything you agree to is put in writing and you understand it (e.g. NDIS plan).

Self-advocacy steps



1 Problem analysis:

- What is the problem or issue (e.g. need a new prosthesis, need an updated NDIS Plan, need new working arrangements)?
- What do you need to do to fix this problem or issue (e.g. trial a different prosthetic foot, request more funding)?
- What facts do you have (e.g. information about new prosthetics, disability rights)?



2 Information gathering:

- What additional information do you need (e.g. laws, rules, policies, reports)?
- Where can you get this information (e.g. personal notes, internet, organisations)?
- Who is the decision-maker (person) that can help solve this problem (e.g. doctor, prosthetist, teacher, NDIS staff)?
- Are there other people who can help (e.g. Limbs 4 Life, family, disability advocacy organisation)?



3 Solution analysis:

- What are some possible, specific and realistic solutions to this problem or issue?
- What are some barriers that might get in the way of these solutions?
- What should the other side (people or organisation) do to help?

What are my consumer rights?

As a consumer all people have the right to complain if they buy a faulty product or receive a service that is not suitable. So, if you've received a product or service (e.g. mobility aid, prosthesis, home repairs) that is not 'fit for purpose' or not working properly you should complain to the business or person who supplied it. Depending on the situation you may be entitled to repair, replacement or refund. This law protects you when you use your own money, or buy goods and services using your NDIS or other government funding.

To find out more, learn about your rights and options, or get assistance when making a complaint:

- The consumer protection agency (sometimes called 'consumer affairs') in your state or territory
- NDIS 'Quality and Safeguards Commission' (1800 035 544)

Where can I get advocacy support?

Your rights, such as human and disability rights, are very important. You are entitled to have your voice heard when expressing your views, concerns and important decisions being made about your life. If you need support to speak up about your rights or make a complaint, you may benefit from a disability advocate. An advocate can help by speaking on your behalf to services, organisations and employers, making complaints about discrimination and more.

The National Disability Advocacy Program lists a range of advocacy services. Some agencies are general, and available to assist people with any type of disability or cultural background. Whereas other specialist ones provide assistance to people with a specific type of disability, regarding specific issues (e.g. housing, employment), or those from diverse cultural or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island backgrounds.

To find a Disability Advocate to support you visit www.disabilityadvocacyfinder.dss.gov.au/

Limbs 4 Life is available to assist amputees to learn how to self-advocate and point you in the right direction if you are making a formal complaint. While we may not be able to assist in all cases, we are always here to listen and support you to the best of our abilities.

