Disability Advocacy Support Helpline

A guide to our services

Brought to you by
Advocacy Law Alliance in partnership
with the Disability Gateway.

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The **Disability Advocacy Support Helpline** team believes everyone has the right to equality and a fair go. We support people with disability to stand up for their rights, be treated fairly, and enjoy a good quality of life.

About our services

What is the Disability Advocacy Support Helpline?

The Helpline is a time limited, individual advocacy service for all people with disability, their carers or support people. The service is provided over the telephone, text messaging, email, or video call, depending on what works best for you.

How can we help you?

Our experienced advocates can give you guidance on aspects of your life where you feel you are being treated unfairly. We can also help you understand and defend your rights.

We will work with you to help you resolve your issue, with support usually provided over a maximum of three sessions. We will also support you to advocate for yourself wherever possible.

Our advocates will listen to you, provide information, explore options and work with you to agree on steps to take to address the issue. If your matter is not suited to time limited advocacy, we will try to find more appropriate services to assist you.

What issues do we help with?

Our helpline advocates can assist you with one issue at a time. We can help you understand your rights and get fair treatment with:

- government services and programs like Centrelink and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)
- disability services
- other services and businesses
- workplaces
- schools, universities and TAFEs
- accommodation
- transport and access
- healthcare and money issues.

What can't we help with?

There are some things that are not covered by our individual advocacy services, but we will always do our best to point you towards someone who can assist. We will tell you why if we cannot help with a particular issue.

Our services do not include:

- **assistance with matters at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (ART)** – once matters progress to the ART, you will be referred to an NDIS Appeals provider
- **legal advice** – we are a non-legal advocacy service, but we can make appropriate referrals to access legal advice from a community legal centre or legal aid
- **casework services** – we are unable to provide support to address multiple issues at once, or help with applying for or managing services
- **advocacy services when a more appropriate service is available** – if there is a service more suited to your issue, we will help by referring you to this service. Your advocate will discuss these options with you
- **advocating for two people with different perspectives in the same matter** – we cannot advocate for two people in the same matter if they have different points of view about the best outcome.

How much do our services cost?

Nothing – they are free.

Our advocates will listen to you, provide information, explore options and work with you to agree on steps to take to address the issue.

How our services work

What will happen?

We will work with you to understand the issue and what kind of help you might need from our service. This may be information and resources to help you resolve the issue and self-advocate, or some one-on-one support from an advocate.

If we are providing one-on-one support, your advocate will work with you in partnership to sort out the issue. First, your advocate will talk to you about the issue, what has happened so far, and what result you are looking for. Your advocate will then give you some feedback about any problems that may be stopping you from making progress, and possible actions you could take to get a fair go. This might involve things like making a complaint, asking for a review, or working through a decision about what to do next.

The advocacy we provide is delivered via telephone sessions. As this is a time limited advocacy service, the maximum number of sessions available for an issue is usually three sessions.

Our focus will be on helping you build and use your skills and knowledge to take on the issue, so you have the best chance of getting a fair outcome.

What can you do?

If we are providing one-on-one support, we will work with you to identify the actions you can take and those your advocate can take to progress the issue. We will support you to advocate for yourself wherever possible, as we believe that building these skills will help set you up to sort out other issues that may occur in the future.

We understand you are the expert in your life and you will be kept at the centre of all decisions. It is our role to stand beside you, support you, and help with the resources you need to get a fair go.

Who will work with you?

Our team of advocates is made up of people from many different backgrounds, all with relevant qualifications, skills and experience working in advocacy. We are a culturally safe service, committed to providing a welcoming and useful service to everyone – including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people from non-English-speaking backgrounds, and the LGBTIQA+ community. Our advocates provide an end-to-end service, meaning you will usually be supported by the one person throughout your advocacy issue.

Are our advocacy services independent?

We work as independently from other service providers and government as possible. For every case, we check that an advocate's interests will not interfere with their advocacy work. If we identify any possible conflicts of interest we have procedures to deal with this openly and transparently.

Our advocates cannot accept gifts or payments from people they are supporting with advocacy services.

When might advocacy services need to stop?

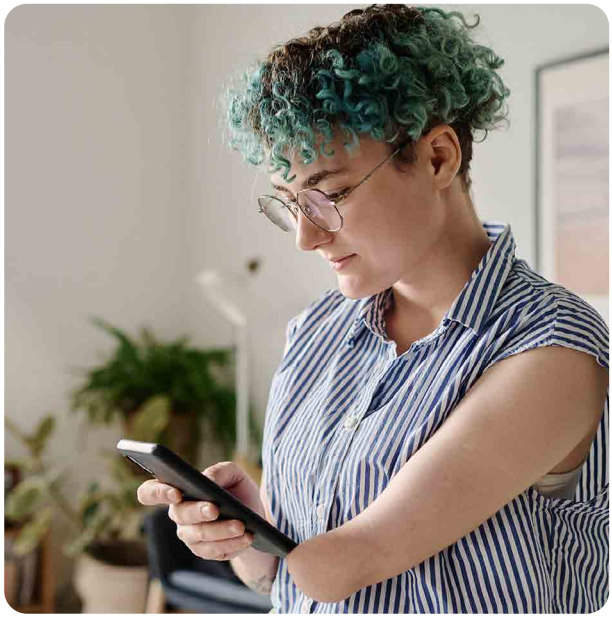
Advocacy support will stop once the agreed service is provided or if there is a different service that will better meet your needs. We will discuss this with you and can help with a referral. We will also stop support if you threaten or scare staff, or if our involvement is doing harm to you or our organisation. We have limited resources and must ensure everyone's safety while providing the best service we can.

We understand you are the expert in your life and you will be kept at the centre of all decisions.

Your rights and responsibilities

Your rights

1. To be treated with fairness and respect
2. To make your own decisions about the advocacy support services you receive
3. To be fully informed in a way you can understand
4. To have your personal information protected and not shared without your permission
5. To feel safe about complaining if you are not satisfied with your advocate
6. To work with an advocate who is independent from disability service providers and has no conflict of interest



Your responsibilities

1. To treat your advocate with respect
2. To tell your advocate everything you know about your issue
3. To actively work with your advocate and complete any tasks where possible that will help progress the issue
4. To let us know with reasonable notice if you need to change or cancel a telephone appointment
5. To provide any documentation requested by your advocate within an agreed timeframe
6. To remain in contact with your advocate for the duration of your matter. If your advocate is unable to contact you, we will be unable to support you and will close your matter

We will work with you to identify the actions you can take and those your advocate can take.

Your personal information

Why do we keep your information?

The Helpline team collects information in an electronic file about every person who uses the service. We do this to make sure we record the work we do for you and to keep track of how we are going in getting the outcome you want.

How do we keep and use your information?

We keep basic personal information and other information about your situation. We record the results you are hoping for and take notes on what we have been doing. From this information, we also put together reports to show that we are doing our job. For instance, we may report on how many people we worked with and the most common disability of those who came to us for help. These reports do not identify any individuals.

How long do we keep your information?

We will keep your file on our system for seven (7) years. After seven years, your file may be destroyed and we are not required to provide you with a copy of your file.

Can you see your file?

You are welcome to see or get a copy of your file any time while we are working with you, or for seven years after – just contact us and ask.
You can only request your own personal file or that of a child for whom you are the legal guardian. After you confirm your identity you may be provided with a copy of the file, but the file will continue to belong to the service.

How is information kept safe?

Your privacy is of great importance to us. Your file will be stored in a secure Customer Relationship Management System.

Who has access to your information?

The only people who can look at your file are the people who work for the Helpline and are assisting with your case. If we need to talk to other people about your case, we will ask for your permission first. The exceptions to this are:

- in some cases a law court or legal authority may order us to provide information in a file
- when we have a legal obligation to report a child at risk
- where there is a serious risk to a person's life, health or safety, or threat to public health or safety.

Please contact us if you would like a copy of our Privacy Policy.

You are welcome to see or get a copy of your file any time while we are working with you.

Our commitment to quality

What can you do if you are unhappy with our services?

If you are not happy with any part of our services you have the right to tell us and we will respond. We welcome any feedback – positive or negative – because it helps us provide better services. Your complaint will be handled fairly and will not affect your advocacy matter or access to our service.

How can you make a complaint or give feedback?

You can complain or give feedback at any time in a way that suits you:

- **Talk to your advocate** or person you have the problem with. When you do this you can bring a friend, family member, carer or someone you trust
- **Call one of our Team Manager** on our Complaints Line on (02) 4062 0772. You can have a friend, family member, carer or someone you trust support you when making a complaint
- **Write to us at:**
  Suite 1, Level 2, Devonshire House
  408 King Street
  Newcastle West NSW 2302
- **Email us at**
  thehelpline@advocacylaw.org.au
- If you would like to make a complaint through an independent external service, please contact the Complaints Resolution and Referral Service (CRRS) on 1800 880 052

We welcome any feedback because it helps us provide better services.

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More information

To find out more about our services, please get in touch.

Email: thehelpline@advocacylaw.org.au

The Disability Advocacy Support Helpline team acknowledges all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, their lands, waters, and beliefs in which we are privileged to work with and for. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging across all Countries of Australia for they hold the memories, traditions, culture and hope of their People.

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