



Australian Government

Department of Families,
Housing, Community Services
and Indigenous Affairs



National Disability Advocacy Program and Quality Assurance Information for consumers

Improving the lives of Australians



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The document must be attributed as the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Quality National Disability Advocacy Program and Quality Assurance Information for consumers.

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Summary

Disability advocacy agencies funded under the National Disability Advocacy Program are required to undergo a Quality Assurance audit each year to show that they are providing the best possible advocacy support and meeting the Disability Advocacy Standards. This booklet describes what happens when a Quality Assurance audit is conducted at your disability advocacy agency.

Quality Assurance

During the audit, your disability advocacy agency needs to show – among other things – that they are facilitating effective advocacy support, managing their agency effectively, avoiding conflicts of interest, employing advocates and other staff skilled in advocacy and managing complaints appropriately.

The audit

The audit involves your disability advocacy agency's own self-assessment and then a visit from an audit team, where advocates, other agency staff and a range of people receiving advocacy support provide input.

Input from people receiving advocacy support

People receiving advocacy support have the choice to take part – this is voluntary and a consent process is required. If you do decide to take part, you have the chance to say how effective your disability advocacy agency has been for you. Ways to take part include talking to an audit team member or allowing the audit team to see your file. You can choose whether to do one, both or neither of these.

You can have assistance from an independent person (for example, a family member, friend, an advocate from another agency, or other independent support person), to make the decision about whether or not to take part and to assist you while talking to the audit team, if needed.

Outcome

At the end of the audit, the audit team makes a decision about whether your disability advocacy agency can be certified to receive continuing funding. The audit team may make recommendations or requirements about improvements that need to happen in order for your disability advocacy agency to be certified.



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Introduction

This booklet explains Quality Assurance and the auditing of disability advocacy agencies. The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) is responsible for overseeing Quality Assurance in disability advocacy agencies funded under the National Disability Advocacy Program. FaHCSIA has a Quality Assurance system to ensure that these disability advocacy agencies provide the best possible advocacy support.

In order to be certified, obtain a Certificate of Compliance and receive funding from FaHCSIA, every disability advocacy agency must demonstrate through an independent audit that they meet the Disability Advocacy Standards. The audit is concerned with assessing disability advocacy agencies, not the people using these agencies.

This booklet is for people with disability who are using any of the following types of disability advocacy agencies¹:

- ▶ Individual advocacy
- ▶ Self advocacy
- ▶ Family advocacy
- ▶ Citizen advocacy
- ▶ Legal advocacy
- ▶ Systemic advocacy.

All of these types of advocacy are subject to the Quality Assurance audit.

This booklet aims to assist people receiving advocacy support to understand the auditing process, the role of the audit team and how they can participate in the audit.

¹ The booklet could also be used by family members/carers in the case of family advocacy or citizen advocates in the case of citizen advocacy.

Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance refers to systematic assessment, evaluation and certification processes that ensure that agencies operate at a high standard, providing well managed and effective systems that meet the required outcomes for that agency.

For disability advocacy agencies, this operates as an accreditation process, measured against the Disability Advocacy Standards and associated key performance indicators; disability advocacy agencies need to show that they are appropriately implementing the standards and indicators.

Important aspects of Quality Assurance for disability advocacy agencies include ensuring that they:

- ▶ facilitate advocacy that meets the objectives of people with disability who receive advocacy support and that facilitates their involvement
- ▶ provide evidence of documentation that supports good management systems, clear policies and the involvement of people with disability and their families/carers
- ▶ avoid conflicts of interest and put the advocacy needs of people with disability first
- ▶ employ advocates and other staff who have the appropriate skills and training to advocate effectively
- ▶ manage complaints against their agency in a way that ensures that people receiving advocacy support can freely make and have resolved any complaints or disputes.

More information

Further information about the Disability Advocacy Standards and key performance indicators, can be found at: <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/disability/standards/Pages/default.aspx>

The Quality Assurance and auditing process

Quality Assurance for disability advocacy agencies is based on a three year cycle, and involves annual audit visits to your agency.

The stages in the process are:

1. Preparation.
2. Assessment by an audit team.
3. Certification or period of improvement.

These are summarised in the chart here and explained in more detail below:

<p>1. Preparation stage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Your advocates and other agency staff do a self-assessment of the agency ▶ You decide whether or not you want to take part in the audit, and if you do want to, you receive assistance to organise your participation.
<p>2. Assessment by the audit team</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The agency is assessed against the Disability Advocacy Standards ▶ This includes input from people receiving advocacy support (first hand input or permission to access files) ▶ This also includes input from advocates and other agency staff.
<p>3. Certification or period of improvement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The agency is either certified or required to make improvements ▶ Meeting to discuss the audit findings ▶ Report about the audit findings.

1. Preparation

Before the audit team’s visit, you and your disability advocacy agency need to prepare for the audit process. This may involve some or all of the following:

- ▶ Your agency conducting a self-assessment of their own policies and procedures – you might be asked to assist by discussing your disability advocacy agency with your advocates, other agency staff or by providing some written input
- ▶ Your agency informing you of the purpose and timing of the audit
- ▶ You choosing whether or not you wish to participate, with assistance with this decision from an independent person, if needed (see section on “Assistance” for suggestions of who the independent person could be)
- ▶ You being contacted to determine the method and timing of your participation, if you choose to take part.

2. Assessment by the audit team

After the preparation stage has been completed, the next stage of the Quality Assurance process is an assessment by the audit team.

This involves an audit team visiting your disability advocacy agency at least once a year and may be for one or a few days, depending on the size of your disability advocacy agency.

Types of audits

An audit must be completed every year. Once every three years there is a certification/ re-certification audit, and during the intervening two years there are surveillance audits to check that your disability advocacy agency continues to comply with the necessary requirements. Surveillance audits are a smaller scale version of the certification audit.

The audit team

The audit team is from an independent certification body, meaning that no member of the audit team is associated or linked to your disability advocacy agency. This is to ensure that the audit team can make a fair and impartial judgement of your disability advocacy agency.

The team is made up of:

- ▶ The lead auditor
- ▶ Other auditors (number dependent on the size of your disability advocacy agency)
- ▶ The consumer technical expert (a person with disability who assists the audit team to understand the experiences of people with disability).

All audit team members have training in Quality Assurance for disability advocacy agencies.

The auditing process

During their assessment, the audit team requires input from people receiving advocacy support and from your advocates and other agency staff. This involves both first-hand input and analysis of documents provided by each.

The audit team has the following interactions with people receiving advocacy support:

- ▶ Receiving their first-hand input, through verbal or written methods
- ▶ Analysing their files and records.

Please see the sections below for further information on the involvement of those people receiving advocacy support in the Quality Assurance process.

The audit team has the following interactions with advocates and other agency staff:

- ▶ Analysing information on your disability advocacy agency's management, usual policies and procedures and funding arrangements
- ▶ Meeting with advocates and other agency staff to discuss Quality Assurance in your disability advocacy agency.



Assessment method

Throughout their interactions with people receiving advocacy support, advocates and agency staff, the audit team is required to assess your disability advocacy agency against Quality Assurance criteria. The criteria align to each of the Disability Advocacy Standards and associated key performance indicators.

The audit team rates your disability advocacy agency based on a three-point scale of how well they are conforming or not conforming to the Disability Advocacy Standards. They then assess these individual ratings together to form the overall assessment. When the audit team assesses the ratings together, they pay particular attention to the lowest ratings.

Your involvement

The audit team does not need to speak to every person receiving support from your disability advocacy agency during the audit. You are free to agree or disagree to take part, and free to have an independent person to assist you with making this decision, if needed (see section on “Assistance” for suggestions of who the independent person could be).

The audit team chooses between 5 and 10 people from those who want to participate. They include people who have different disabilities, ages, cultural backgrounds, living situations and experiences with your disability advocacy agency.

Ways to participate

If you do want to participate in the audit, then there are two main ways for you to do so:

- ▶ You can provide first-hand input into the audit, through one of the following methods (some or all of these methods may be available):
 - ▶ A face-to-face interview with an audit team member
 - ▶ A telephone interview with an audit team member
 - ▶ A focus group with other people receiving advocacy support from your agency
 - ▶ A questionnaire and/or feedback form
 - ▶ An informal chat with an audit team member about what you think of your disability advocacy agency.
- ▶ You can allow the audit team to see your file with information about you and your advocacy history. Please see the section below for information on privacy and use of your information.

Consent, privacy and use of your information

Participation in the Quality Assurance process is voluntary and you are not required to take part if you do not wish to. If you do, the audit team requires you to formally consent to participate; this usually involves signing a consent form, but where this is not possible, other ways can be used that are more appropriate .

All information collected from you – whether via first-hand input or from your file – is protected by privacy and confidentiality measures. While your disability advocacy agency knows who has participated, the audit team does not identify which information has been collected specifically from you. All information is reported together in a way that does not identify individuals, and no names are included.

If you consent and the audit team does collect information about you from your file, this is treated sensitively, and is used only to assess whether your disability advocacy agency has sufficiently met each Disability Advocacy Standard and key performance indicator in your specific case. The information is not used for any purpose beyond the audit. All reporting is confidential.

Topics covered by interviews, focus groups or questionnaires

If you contribute first-hand into the Quality Assurance process through any of the written or verbal methods outlined above, the questions are on the following types of topics:

- ▶ How satisfied or unsatisfied you are with your disability advocacy agency, and why
- ▶ Whether you receive the advocacy assistance you want and need from your disability advocacy agency
- ▶ Whether you have the opportunity to provide input into and make choices about your advocacy
- ▶ Whether you have received appropriate advocacy supports, such as accessible information, education, mentoring and effective representation
- ▶ Whether you have complaints about your disability advocacy agency, and whether you know the processes for making a complaint
- ▶ What you would change or improve about your disability advocacy agency.

Assistance

If you need someone to assist you in taking part in the audit, this is permitted. It is important that you choose someone who knows you well, but who is not from the agency being audited. Some examples of who you could choose include a family member, friend, an advocate from another agency, or other independent support person.

3. Certification or period of improvement

After the audit team has completed its assessment, they make a decision about whether your disability advocacy agency is meeting the Disability Advocacy Standards and should be certified. They also communicate their findings in a meeting at the end of the audit and through a written report provided after the audit is over.

Certification

The audit team makes a decision about whether your disability advocacy agency should be certified.

If there has been a certification audit and the audit team decides that your disability advocacy agency complies with the Disability Advocacy Standards, your agency is certified and a Certificate of Compliance is issued. Where there has been a surveillance audit, and your agency complies with the Disability Advocacy Standards, certification is maintained. Suggestions for minor improvements may be offered, but your disability advocacy agency is not required to change anything. Your disability advocacy agency continues to receive funding from FaHCSIA.

If the audit team decides that your disability advocacy agency does not comply with the Disability Advocacy Standards, it outlines what needs to be fixed and gives a deadline of when this needs to occur. Once the problem areas are fixed, your disability advocacy agency meets the requirements for certification and FaHCSIA funding continues. If the problems are not addressed within the required timeframe your disability advocacy agency could lose its certification, and its future FaHCSIA funding is at risk.

For people receiving advocacy support, this means that there is a system in place every year to ensure that improvements are made to the quality and systems by which advocacy is conducted. Because a disability advocacy agency cannot be certified unless it has made all of the necessary improvements, this aims to ensure the best and most appropriate advocacy possible, with a process in place for continuous improvement.

Meeting to present the findings

The audit team holds a meeting at the conclusion of the audit to outline and discuss their findings in relation to your disability advocacy agency. Advocates and other staff from your agency attend the meeting. You can also choose to attend as well if you wish to, however this is not compulsory.

The audit team's report

The audit team also writes a report about your disability advocacy agency. This report outlines their ratings on each Disability Advocacy Standard, the associated key performance indicators and their overall assessment. The report outlines the strengths of your disability advocacy agency, as well as the areas in which improvement is recommended or required. FaHCSIA and your disability advocacy agency receive a copy of this report.

Complaints

All people receiving advocacy support have a right to make a complaint either about the conduct of the audit team or about their disability advocacy agency. The contacts below are a starting point for making complaints.

Complaints about the audit team

If you wish to make a complaint about the audit team, you should inform your disability advocacy agency.

Complaints about your disability advocacy agency

If you wish to make a complaint about your disability advocacy agency to someone other than your agency or the audit team, you could contact:



Complaints
Resolution &
Referral
Service

Complaints Resolution and Referral Service

Phone: 1800 880 052

