

## Advocacy Covid-19 and Beyond

### Background

This paper has been developed in partnership with representatives of advocacy agencies and the wider health and social care sector including Local Authorities and Health partners. It has been generated through a series of structured conversations with individual colleagues and a structured discussion group with attendance of 25 representatives. This was carried out on a modest scale to ensure that the paper was able to be produced within a tight timeframe.

The pandemic affects all of us, our family, social and working lives, and our liberty. This is especially so for people who need care and support and for carers. Covid-19 has impacted people's well-being and made it harder for people to get essential support. Independent advocacy plays a critical role in addressing this and supporting people's human rights. This paper provides background about advocacy and outlines 6 sets of actions which leaders, commissioners, and managers in local authorities can take to better use the potential of advocacy at this critical time and into the future.

*" advocacy is taking action to help people say what they want, secure their rights, represent their interests and obtain services they need. advocates and advocacy schemes work in partnership with the people they support and take their side. advocacy promotes social inclusion, equality and social justice "* Action for Advocacy

There are myths circulating which might restrict people's access to advocacy. [This Myth Buster by advocacy organisations addresses these.](#)

<b>Non- Statutory Advocacy</b>	<b>Statutory Advocacy</b> ( <i>Statutory advocacy means a person is legally entitled to an advocate because of their circumstances.</i> ) <sup>1</sup>
<i>Self-advocacy</i>	<i>Independent Care Act Advocate (ICAA)</i>
<i>Group advocacy</i>	<i>Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA)</i>
<i>Peer advocacy</i>	<i>Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy (IMCA)</i>
<i>Citizen advocacy</i>	<i>Independent Complaints Advocacy (ICAS)</i>
<i>Professional advocacy</i>	

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.scie.org.uk/care-act-2014/advocacy-services/commissioning-independent-advocacy/duties/independent-advocacy-care-act.asp>  
<https://www.scie.org.uk/care-act-2014/advocacy-services/commissioning-independent-advocacy/duties/statutory-advocacy-duties.asp>

## **Actions for local authority leaders, commissioners, and managers**

1. **Champion Human Rights.** Advocacy plays an essential role in promoting people's human rights. The need for advocacy has increased during the pandemic, but nationally there are fewer referrals than previously.
  - speak with colleagues within and outside the local authority to encourage referrals
  - involve people with lived experience at every level to understand what will help encourage and support use of advocacy
  - monitor referral levels from different teams and manage gaps
  - work with advocacy organisations to review and plan how to increase the number of eligible referrals made
  - build duty to refer into training, databases and forms
  - work with your external colleagues, including the NHS to encourage them to monitor, review and promote referrals
  
2. **Promote access.** Ensure all your local service providers are required to facilitate contact between clients and advocates. Concerns about Covid-19 have at times resulted in inappropriately stringent restrictions on people meeting their advocates.
  - use the commissioning or contracting role and relationships to encourage and support NHS, independent sector and local authority service providers to promote people's ability to access to advocacy. This needs to be available both face-to-face in Covid-safe ways and by facilitating video and telephone meetings
  
3. **Make advocacy a critical friend.** Advocates are independent skilled practitioners with an up-to-date understanding of what's happening directly in the lives of people who use services and carers. They can help identify issues and provide insights for service improvement and recognise that this is especially important in this rapidly changing environment.
  - ensure regular meetings with advocacy organisations allowing time for discussion about trends, issues, concerns, and possible solutions
  - consider how advocates and advocacy organisation can help people who use services and carers have a meaningful say in decisions about services and communities and promote co-production
  - identify forums and working groups in which input from advocacy organisations will add value
  - embrace and promote receiving challenges from advocates as an essential way of safeguarding people's human rights and voice and role model this behaviour
  
4. **Support anti-discriminatory design and practice.** Covid-19 and Black Lives Matters movement have focused attention on existing structural inequalities. The pandemic has a differential impact according to ethnicity, gender, disability, socio-economic status and geography. Advocacy can play a vital role in addressing this
  - Review commissioning practices to ensure they seek high-quality service which best serve people who most need them and have plans that address the structural inequalities that are barriers to accessing quality social care, health and the advocacy service itself
  - seek information from advocacy organisations about the actions they are taking to address structural inequalities and monitor their outcomes

5. **Measure what matters, learn from what is happening.** Effective contract monitoring plays an essential role in improving performance, ensuring accountability and promoting shared learning and action.
  - review together with advocacy organisations any changes which are needed to ensure that monitoring is action and learning focused and proportionate
  - seek to ensure an appropriate mix of quantitative and qualitative performance measures
  - promote the value of national and consistent approaches to data collection and monitoring so that gaps can be identified, compliance with statutory duties ensured, and performance can be compared
  
6. **Commission better advocacy for the future.** Recognise that statutory requirements set out the minimum lawful provision of advocacy. Commissioning which extends beyond this enables the local authority to better promote people's well-being and contributes to healthy and sustainable communities. It will help to meet needs as we progress beyond this phase of the pandemic, for example the predicted long-term impact on people's mental health.
  - consider how enhanced advocacy provision can help address the issues communities and local authorities face. Explore creative methods of advocacy to include people from BAME backgrounds and those who do not use traditional methods of communication such sensory or hearing loss
  - co-design enhanced advocacy services together with people who may benefit from them and with advocacy organisations build the outcomes into commissioning plans include in Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and Market Position Statements

Advocacy promotes and defends people's human rights, helps us to live up to the values of health and social care and puts into practice the principles that are at the heart of Making Safeguarding Personal. Making individuals central to decision making processes will raise awareness of rights and responsibilities and encourage choice. This is the key to promoting positive outcome for people. As social care leaders and professionals we have a critical role in bringing this value into the lives of people who use our services and our communities.

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