



NICE: Improving access to advocacy

Training Aid 1

This guide is intended to help advocates take practical steps to improve access to advocacy services. By understanding and addressing barriers that individuals may face, advocates can ensure that more people have the support they need to participate fully in decisions about their health and social care. This aligns with NICE guidance NG227, specifically section 1.2, which emphasises ensuring equal access to advocacy services.

Why improving access matters

Helping people access advocacy services is essential for upholding their rights and supporting involvement in decision-making processes. Many individuals, especially from underserved or marginalised communities, may face barriers to seeking or understanding advocacy. As an advocate, your role includes identifying these barriers and addressing them to ensure everyone has the opportunity for support.

Collaborating with referral sources

Aligned with NICE Guideline 1.5, "Working with other services"

- **Build relationships with referrers:** Establish regular contact with key referral sources, such as social workers, healthcare providers, and community support staff. Building rapport helps streamline the referral process and encourages referrers to contact you about potential cases.
- **Explain advocacy clearly:** Offer to speak with individuals directly to explain what advocacy is, how it can help, and what they can expect. This transparency can ease their concerns and make them more receptive to support.
- **Encourage referrer contact for complex cases:** Let referrers know they can contact you with questions about potential referrals, especially if there are specific barriers to access like communication challenges or language needs.

Supporting self-referrals

In line with NICE Guideline 1.2, "Encouraging access"

- **Promote direct access:** Encourage individuals to contact advocacy services directly if they need support. Provide clear information on how they can get in contact including describing the function of our Central Support Team (CST).
- **Guide through the self-referral process:** Offer guidance on what individuals can expect during self-referral and reassure them that advocacy is confidential and aimed at supporting their rights and choices.

- **Build confidence for reluctant self-referrers:** For those hesitant to self-refer, explain that advocacy is designed to be supportive and non-judgmental. Let them know that you're there to listen and help.

Understanding cultural and social contexts

Reflecting NICE Guideline 1.4, "Respecting diversity"

- **Acknowledge cultural and social factors:** Take time to understand any cultural or social influences that may affect how individuals perceive or interact with advocacy services. Be mindful of any stigmas associated with seeking support.
- **Approach with sensitivity:** If working with someone from a different background, ask if there are any preferences or traditions they would like you to respect, ensuring the support process feels safe and comfortable for them.

Example scenario: Direct outreach and simplified communication



You're working with Raj, a 74-year-old man recently diagnosed with a chronic condition. He speaks limited English and lives alone, rarely engaging with local services. Raj is unfamiliar with advocacy and hesitant to engage, believing he can manage without support.

After being referred, you visit him with translated materials and explain in plain language how advocacy can help him communicate his health needs and access services. You listen to his concerns and make sure he feels comfortable before moving forward. Raj eventually opens up, allowing you to advocate effectively for adjustments to his care plan.

Reflection prompts for advocates

- Have you encountered situations where language or unfamiliarity with services posed a barrier? How did you approach it?
- What steps could you take to increase comfort and understanding in initial meetings for individuals like Raj?

Tips for improving access in advocacy

1. **Be person-centred**
 - Always ask individuals about their preferred methods of communication and ensure they understand each step of the advocacy process.
2. **Encourage family or community involvement**
 - If appropriate, involve trusted family members or community representatives who can bridge communication gaps, while respecting confidentiality.
3. **Focus on empowerment**
 - Help individuals feel confident asking questions and expressing concerns. Let them know advocacy is about amplifying their voice and respecting their choices.

Key takeaways for advocates

- **Clear, accessible communication:** Use plain language and adaptable strategies to ensure everyone can understand advocacy services.
- **Building trust:** Take time to build trust, especially with individuals unfamiliar with or hesitant about advocacy.
- **Supporting independence:** Empower individuals to understand their rights and options, so they feel confident in accessing support.

By being proactive, flexible, and sensitive to individual needs, advocates play a vital role in breaking down barriers and making advocacy accessible to all. This aligns with NICE guidance's emphasis on equality and respect, enhancing the individual's experience and support outcomes.



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