

How to Advocate for Yourself or Others

The Aged Rights Advocacy Service Inc. (ARAS) has a mandate to provide advocacy assistance to older people and their representatives who are receiving community-based services, living in Commonwealth subsidised aged care facilities or who are at risk of, or are being abused.

An important aspect of the assistance provided by ARAS is preparing and enabling people to self-advocate i.e. to speak on their own behalf in order to gain information, access services, change their services to better meet their needs, and to generally stay in control of and self-manage their lives.

ARAS has prepared the following guide to assist you to self-advocate when you are experiencing difficulties with the services you are receiving.

Gather the Facts

- Get accurate information about your rights and entitlements e.g. contracts, agreements, service standards, agencies' internal complaints procedure
- Gather information about what has occurred e.g. amount of money withdrawn
- Work out what you want and how you want to be assisted.

Prepare your Case

- Clearly identify what is concerning you and how you want it changed e.g. What is the problem? When does the problem occur? Who is involved? How does it affect you? How does it make you feel? and How do you want it to change?
- Decide if you want to deal with the matter by phone or in person
- Find out who to speak to and arrange an appointment where and when it suits you
- Prepare what you want to say and write it down, leaving space for notes and answers.

The Meeting

- Be positive and start the discussion with what you like about the service e.g. staff, flexibility, how well it meets your needs, location of facility, etc
- Be specific about your concern and ask what can be done i.e. appeal to the agency's professionalism
- Repeat their answers back to them, *“So you are saying that I can have more cleaning but it won't be available for 3 months?”* or *“So I am not entitled to free physiotherapy but I can access a \$10 service?”*

- Support your argument with facts e.g. *“It is my understanding from reading my contract...”* or *“This brochure states...”*
- Ask questions if you have not understood or if the person is not being clear, as it helps you to stay in control
- The agency will help to find a solution, so you can ask them *“What do you suggest?”*, *“Where can I get help?”* or *“What are my options?”*
- Ask for a time frame e.g. *“When will the new system start?”* or *“When is the latest you will get back to me?”*
- Remember to treat the staff with courtesy; it will be easier for them to help you find a solution to your problem.

The Outcome

If you are happy with the outcome, reinforce their good practice by letting them know that you are pleased with the meeting/your service.

If you are not happy:

- Indicate that you will be taking the matter further
- Ask who else you can speak to
- Give them your case in writing
- Ask for a copy of the minutes of the meeting
- Consider seeking advocacy support from ARAS.

Using these techniques will assist you to stay in control of the services that you receive, although you always have the option to seek support from an independent advocate, be it a friend, family member or agency.

It is not always easy or possible to do it on your own and it is sometimes worthwhile to discuss your concern with someone else, to gather different ideas and another perspective on your question.

Remember that it is your right to ask questions and be consulted about your services and this communication assists agencies to provide a quality service.

Further Information

ARAS is a free, statewide, confidential and independent service.

For more information or support to protect and uphold your rights, please contact ARAS:

45 Flinders Street, Adelaide SA 5000

Telephone **8232 5377** or

1800 700 600 freecall for country callers

Email **aras@agedrights.asn.au**

Website **www.sa.agedrights.asn.au**

or **www.elderabuse.org.au**

This fact sheet provides general information only and is not intended to substitute for legal advice. Whilst care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the material, no responsibility can be taken for any errors or omissions.

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