Advocacy Support
Policy and Procedure

Document Title	Advocacy Support Policy and Procedure - South Australia
Related Standards	NDIS Practice Standards – Rights and Responsibilities

Advocacy Support Policy and Procedure - South Australia

1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all participants are informed of, and supported in, their right to use an advocate or representative of their choice at any stage of service delivery. Advocacy enables participants to have their views heard, make informed decisions, and protect their human rights when interacting with In Step Supports Pty Ltd.

This policy promotes fair and transparent practices that respect participant voice and ensure that advocacy is welcomed and supported across all areas of service engagement, including entry, planning, implementation, review, and exit.

2.0 Scope

The policy applies to all staff involved in supporting participants to exercise their right to engage an advocate or representative at any stage of service delivery.

3.0 Definition

Advocacy is the active support for a cause or position, and, in this context, it is an expression of support for a person who may find it difficult to speak for him or herself. It may include achieving social justice, improving a person's well-being, preventing abusive, harmful and discriminatory treatment, or stopping unjust and unfair treatment from meeting their fundamental needs and interests.

Under the NDIS Practice Standards, all participants have the right to access independent advocacy and to be supported to make informed decisions about their lives and services.

Below is a list of six types of advocacies:

Type of Advocacy	Description
1. **Individual advocacy**	The advocacy aims to prevent or address instances of discrimination or abuse using a one-on-one approach
2. **Systemic advocacy**	They are working to influence or secure long-term changes to ensure the collective rights and interests of people with disability
3. **Family advocacy**	A family member advocates to provide a voice on behalf of another family member
4. **Citizen advocacy**	Matches people with disability to volunteers

Type of Advocacy	Description
5. **Legal advocacy**	Upholds the rights and interests of people with disability by addressing the legal aspects of discrimination, abuse and neglect
6. **Self-advocacy**	Supports people with disability to advocate for themselves or as a group

4.0 Policy

In Step Supports Pty Ltd is committed to upholding every participant's right to access and involve an advocate or representative of their choice. Advocacy plays a vital role in protecting participant autonomy, ensuring informed consent, and promoting safe and equitable service delivery.

In line with the NDIS Practice Standards, NDIS Code of Conduct, and the NDIS (Complaints Management and Resolution) Rules 2018, In Step Supports Pty Ltd will ensure that advocacy options are offered, explained, and respected across all stages of service provision.

In Step Supports Pty Ltd will:

- Inform participants of their right to use an advocate at the beginning and throughout their engagement with the organisation
- Provide accessible information about advocacy services, including Easy Read formats, translated materials, and verbal explanation when required
  Refer participants to culturally appropriate, independent advocacy services when requested or when a need for advocacy is identified
- Promote participant capacity for self-advocacy and decision-making through respectful and inclusive support practices
- Include advocates in assessment, planning, delivery, and review processes, with the participant's consent
- Recognise and uphold directions provided by an authorised advocate, within the limits of lawful and ethical service provision
- Support the use of substitute decision-makers when participants are unable to advocate for themselves and formal arrangements exist

Where a participant asks a staff member to act as their advocate, the following steps must be taken to ensure transparency and the management of any conflict of interest:

- The staff member must complete a Conflict of Interest Declaration and Authority to Act as an Advocate Form
- The conflict must be documented in the Conflict of Interest Register

- Management will review the arrangement and provide oversight to ensure ethical boundaries are maintained and the participant's rights are safeguarded

Staff must engage respectfully with all advocates and representatives, treating them with the same consideration and professionalism as they do the participant. All advocacy arrangements will be recorded in the participant's file and reviewed as part of regular service planning and review processes.

4.1 Advocacy principles

- In Step Supports Pty Ltd will ensure that all staff receive training in using advocates.
- In Step Supports Pty Ltd will maintain printed material on advocacy and advocacy services.
- In Step Supports Pty Ltd will maintain local advocacy resource/contact lists.
- In Step Supports Pty Ltd will act positively with any worker appointed as a participant's advocate.
- In Step Supports Pty Ltd will work cooperatively with any nominated advocate chosen by the participant and show the same respect to the advocate as is shown to the participant.
- In Step Supports Pty Ltd will utilise a governance system to enable In Step Supports Pty Ltd to identify where a participant needs advocacy.

Participants will be informed of their right to advocacy during intake and onboarding and at regular review points.

Where a participant nominates a staff member to act as an advocate, a Conflict of Interest Declaration and documented strategies will be required, and this conflict will be actively monitored.

5.0 Procedure

Participants will be provided with information about advocacy in an accessible format that meets their needs, including using Easy Read documents. Advocacy rights will be discussed:

- During intake and assessment
- During planning and review of services
- When any significant decisions are being made about services

Where advocacy concerns are raised, participants will be informed of their right to make a formal complaint, and advocacy support can be provided to assist with this process.

5.1 Initial assessment (participant without an advocate)

- Discuss the participant's right to appoint and have an advocate present to speak on their behalf.
- Provide the participant with advocacy information.
- Explain to the participant their rights regarding advocacy as per the In Step Supports Pty Ltd's Service Agreement and Charter of Rights and the NDIS Practice Standards and Quality Indicators 2021.

- Advise the participant that if they wish to utilise advocacy services, In Step Supports Pty Ltd can assist them in contacting any of these services.
- Provide the Authority to Act as an Advocate Form to the participant if they decide to utilise the services of an advocate. The completed and signed Form is stored in the participant's file.
- Provide the Third-Party Information Release Consent Form to the participant. The completed and signed Form is stored in the participant's file.
- Discuss and document any specific communication issues or protocols between the service and the advocate (email, phone, or other methods).
- Inform the participant that they can add and withdraw approval for an advocate to act on their behalf.

5.2 Initial assessment (participant with advocate/representative)

Before initial assessment

- Ensure during initial contact with the participant that they are informed of their right to an advocate and record the advocate's details if they have one.
- Determine the best means of communication (refer to Preferred Method of Communication Policy).
- Advise the participant of the need to complete the Authority to Act as an Advocate Form and provide the appropriate Form to the participant.
- Contact the nominated advocate to ensure they are aware they are nominated and confirm that they agree to advocate.
- Place the completed Authority to Act as an Advocate Form in the participant's file.
- Ensure the potential participant is aware of their advocacy rights, including the right to have an advocate present for all assessments, meetings and communication between themselves and In Step Supports Pty Ltd.
- Schedule the participant's initial assessment at a time and date to allow the advocate to be present.
- Arrange for an identified advocate to be present at the assessment.

At initial assessment

- Request the completion of the Authority to Act as an Advocate Form if it has not yet been provided. Explain to the participant that the Form must be completed for In Step Supports Pty Ltd to formally recognise the nominated person as the participant's advocate.
- Gather information about the advocate, such as contact details and methodology.
- Explain that the participant has the right to change their advocate. In writing, the participant should document changes using the Authority to Act as an Advocate Form (Easy Read form available).

5.3 Working with advocates

Where conflicts arise between a participant's wishes and their advocate’s views, staff will prioritize the participant’s expressed preferences wherever possible, in line with safeguarding and duty of care obligations.

Staff will also support participants to build capacity for self-advocacy and independent decision-making, where appropriate, through training, accessible information, and ongoing encouragement.

- Identify the existence of an advocate in the participant's file.
- Discuss and document any specific communication issues or protocols between the service and the advocate.
- Communicate with a participant's advocate and involve them in goal setting, planning service responses, and referrals for additional or alternative services.
- Provide the advocate with ongoing information regarding the health and well-being of the participant, as agreed.
- Ensure that all on-call workers are aware of the participant's advocate.

5.4 Continuing work with advocates

- During reassessments, visits, or meetings, provide participants with written and verbal information that reminds them of their right to have (or change) an advocate.
- Remind participants of their right to have (or change) an advocate during each annual review of services or written communication.
- Communicate effectively and work cooperatively with advocates.
- Refer participants assessed as 'not able to manage their service' (and who have no other advocate) to the South Australian Government Office of The Public Advocate, as appropriate.

Note: A web link accessing disability advocacy services is available. As a postcode, town or suburb is required to be entered to access services, In Step Supports Pty Ltd will guide and assist participants. Go to Disability Advocacy Finder on the Department of Social Services website.