

ADVOCACY POLICY

Preamble

The WAMIAC is a non-government organisation which provides a service for people who have, or have had a mental illness, or emotional problems.

The WAMIAC assists people to set up consumer groups and provides the groups with on-going support as decided by the groups. WAMIAC also supports people to self advocate. In instances where the consumer requests assistance, a WAMIAC staff member will advocate with the consumer, or on their behalf.

Definitions

The WAMIAC engages in several forms of advocacy. These are:

Self Advocacy

The WAMIAC provides support to assist consumers to develop or maintain the personal skills and self confidence necessary to enable them to represent their own interests in the community.

Group Advocacy

The WAMIAC provides support to consumers to facilitate the development of consumer groups within the community so that they may represent their own views. These groups are commonly located in a geographical area and/or are specific to the common interests of consumers

Individual Advocacy

Involves advocating with and/or for an individual consumer about issues particular to the individual.

Systemic Advocacy

With guidance from the consumer movement, the WAMIAC advocates for changes to policies and practices at a local, State or National level.

Principles of Advocacy

Employees of WAMIAC have three main responsibilities when providing an advocacy service to consumer(s). These are:

The consumer's wishes that is, advocacy activities are limited to what the consumer identifies as his/her issues of concern and what they identify as his/her preferred outcomes.

What is in the consumer's best interests. This involves the advocate's legal Duty of Care to the consumer. This applies in instances where there is a conflict between the wishes of the consumer and what is in his/her best interest. For example, if a consumer expresses a desire to commit suicide and requests that you not inform anyone of his/her intention, the advocate has a duty of care to report the consumer's intentions to the local Crisis Assessment Team.

Least restrictive Environment involves the advocate's responsibility to the consumer to ensure that whatever the advocacy issue, the advocate advocates for the least restrictive options.

Service User

WAMIAC is funded by the Commonwealth and State governments to advocate for consumers who have or have had a mental illness or emotional problems. WAMIAC provides a Statewide service.

Referral Process

Service users requiring advocacy can obtain an advocate through a direct request, or a request from an interested person or agency. Where the request is made by someone other than the service user, the advocate must seek and gain approval of the service user before any advocacy activities occur.

Rights & Responsibilities

As part of the advocacy process, the advocate must explain to the service user their rights and the advocate's responsibilities to them. The advocate needs to include as part of this process the service user's right to confidentiality.

The advocate should also inform the service user of the advocate's legal obligations to take notations of the advocacy issues.

Notwithstanding this, the service user should also be informed of

his/her right to participate in the notation process, to have access to the notations and have a copy of same.

Confidentiality:

Service users have the right to know that any information they provide to their advocate will be treated with respect and confidentiality. No information passed on to the advocate should be relayed to another individual without prior approval of the service user except under the following circumstances:

- Where there is a risk of harm to the service user or others.
- Where there is a legal requirement as outlined under the Mental Health Act, or other Statute.
- Where the WAMIAC Chief Executive Officer is ensuring that the advocates are complying with the Disability Service Standards in relation to standards of practice including standards of advocacy notations.

All notations are to be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the advocate's office.

Notations

Each advocate is required to maintain group, systemic and individual advocacy notations.

Group advocacy notations are those notations taken at meetings held with a group of consumers about issues of interest to them.

Systemic notations are those notations kept where more than one Service user is requesting advocacy for the same issue for example, patient fees. Systemic issues usually arise out of group advocacy issues

Individual notations are those notations kept where only one service user is involved.

Notations are to include the following:

- The name and address of the group, or service user.
- The contact telephone number of the group, or service user.
- The name of the advocate.
- Who the group or service user was referred by (that is, self, or other person or agency).

- Who are the interested parties (that is, other persons involved in the advocacy issue).
- An outline of the advocacy issues.
- Notations of the actions taken including the dates of same.
- The date the file was closed

The file should remain active for 7 years and then destroyed.

Referrals from WAMIAC

In some instances, it may be more beneficial to the service user to refer their case to another agency.

In instances where this is appropriate, the service user should be informed of the agency, their role, address and telephone number.

Common referral agencies include:

- Mental Health Legal Service
- Office of Public Advocate
- Legal Aid commission
- Villamanta Legal Service
- Human Rights Commission
- Office of Chief Psychiatrist
- Health Complaints Commission.

Closure

When all advocacy issues are resolved, or the service user is referred to another agency, the final outcomes should be noted and the file closed.

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