

Participation, Empowerment and Advocacy Policy

ONCALL

ONCALL/SACARE¹'s vision is to be nationally recognised as the leading integrated community service provider, empowering people to live their best lives. ONCALL is steadfastly focused on quality service that puts the client at the centre, is enabled through technology transformation, and delivered by people who are committed.

Quality and compliance are embedded into our daily actions and behaviours. ONCALL's policies and procedures provide the foundation and framework for our work and actions to ensure we provide best practice service quality and compliance. All staff are required to know and apply ONCALL policies and procedures that apply to their work.

Policy Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that every child, young person and person with a disability supported by ONCALL is enabled and empowered to make decisions about their lives and to participate in, and contribute to, social and civic life in ways that are important to them. It makes explicit ONCALL's commitment to providing advocacy options and to empowering children, young people, and people with a disability through valuing, respecting and creating opportunities to incorporate their insights, talents and experiences in ONCALL service development, planning and delivery.

Policy Scope

This policy applies to all ONCALL staff, management and Board members, consultants, contractors, students and volunteers, and partner organisations who have contact with ONCALL clients and residents.

Policy Statement

This policy supports individuals' human rights to inclusion, participation and active contribution; to influence decisions that affect them; to be respected, enabled and empowered in their lives; and to be provided with access to advocates to facilitate their decision making, choices and participation.

ONCALL:

- recognises children, young people, and people with disability as the experts in their own lives
- values the strengths, capabilities and contributions of children, young people and people with disability
- will provide support and resources and create opportunities to build individuals' strengths and develop their capabilities
- is committed to ensuring children, young people and people with disability are empowered to make decisions and choices (as appropriate to their age) and influence how they live their lives
- recognises the importance of, and will facilitate access to, advocacy to support and/or work on behalf of a child, young person, and person with a disability to help them to speak out, and to promote and defend their rights and interests
- will support children, young people and people with a disability to actively participate in, assume valued life roles (e.g. student, worker, volunteer, community member, friend, partner), and contribute to their communities of choice

¹ ONCALL is inclusive of the following entities - ONCALL Group Australia; Ablecare Pty Ltd trading as ONCALL; SACARE Pty Ltd. Throughout this document, ONCALL/SACARE will be referred to as ONCALL.

- will lead by example in creating an empowering organisational culture and relationships, providing resources, and enhancing individuals' skills and opportunities within ONCALL for meaningful participation and contribution
- will work with service partners and in the community to advocate and promote opportunities for the inclusion, participation and contribution of children, young people and people with disabilities in civic and social life

Practice Principles

In order to deliver on the policy purpose, ONCALL requires the following principles to be applied in the behaviour of all in scope of this policy in every client/resident interaction:

- **capacity:** assume and work on the basis that every person has capacity to make decisions, exercise choice and provide informed consent unless there is evidence to the contrary
Note - where ONCALL is supporting children some limits to individual decision-making capacity may apply
- **communication:** provide communication support specific to the individual such that they are enabled to express their needs, wants and opinions
- **culturally appropriate and sensitive:** approaches to decision-making, participation, advocacy and empowerment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and people with a disability and children, young people and people with a disability from culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- **dignity of risk:** support children, young people and people with a disability to actively participate in an assessment of their strengths, risks, wants and needs to be able to do something that may have a level of risk involved to extend their participation and experience of life
- recognising and supporting the **role of family, carers and advocates** in the lives, decision-making and participation of children, young people and people with a disability
- **supported decision making:** people who require support in decision making will be provided with the support necessary for them to participate in, make, and communicate decisions that affect their lives
- **strength-based:** recognising, harnessing and building upon individuals' unique attributes, skills and strengths
- **voice:** ensure that children, young people and people with a disability have a voice and are included in any discussions and decisions that affect them in all aspects of their lives including their participation in areas and communities of interest

Participation

ONCALL promotes the connection, participation and inclusion of children, young people and people with disabilities with their family, friends and wider community. ONCALL does this individually, organisationally and externally in the community by:

- skilled person-centered planning that is directed by the individual (and family/supporters/ advocates as needed) and reflects their needs, strengths, goals and aspirations
- Planning:
 - incorporates any necessary communication aids to facilitate the individual's central role and voice in planning
 - is tailored to the individual's cultural background and their unique identity
 - identifies any specific aids needed, or other barriers to be addressed, to enable individuals to engage with family, friends and in community life as others do
 - supports individuals to seek additional funding/resources to enable their participation goals

- recruiting and training a diverse workforce with awareness and attributes to engage and listen to children, young people and people with a disability and assist them to develop connections outside those with paid staff, that lead to social and recreational activities, friendships, and valued roles in their communities of choice
- promoting a positive image of people with a disability, children and young people through all its communication channels including with clients/residents and their families, and externally via social and other media. ONCALL notes that positive modelling can enhance individuals' self-esteem and facilitate opportunities for greater participation and pathways to valued community and life roles and enhanced civic engagement and contribution
- developing and nurturing a wide range of community, business and inter-agency links and partnerships that facilitate opportunities for individuals' participation in, and contribution to, the community so that the person is included and valued
- ensuring links are developed in communities of relevance to the individual including with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and cultural communities of relevance to individuals
- capturing (via client surveys, feedback and support plan reviews) measuring, reporting and reviewing client outcomes and participation via the Audit, Compliance, Risk Management (ACRM) Committee as a means of identifying and monitoring continuous improvements

Support Networks and Relationships

ONCALL encourages and promotes the participation in, maintenance and development of communication and relationships for our clients. We will ensure staff are aware of the importance of client support networks and promote free and open access to people who enhance their lives.

Such relationships might include the client and their spouse/partner, family members, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, advocates and support workers.

ONCALL will continue to:

- encourage clients to maintain contact and involvement with their family, friends and advocates
- encourage the involvement with families, advocates or guardians in key decisions affecting the client, if the client chooses to do so
- respect a client's informed choice if they decide they do not wish to maintain contact with their families, friends or advocates
- ensure the client's rights and well-being are given priority when there is conflict between a client and their family

Empowerment

Empowerment is both a process of developing skills, confidence and a voice, and a desired outcome. ONCALL empowers and develops children, young people and people with a disability by working individually, organisationally and within the broader community.

Individual Focus of Empowerment

ONCALL:

- recognises, supports and enhances individuals' decision-making and voice by applying the practice principles above in all interactions with children, young people and people with a disability
- promotes and enables individuals' participation, inclusion and contributions in meaningful social and civic roles
- provides information on, and access to, advocates who can support individuals' voice, aspirations and rights to be included and to be heard

Organisational Focus of Empowerment

ONCALL recognises the value of the contribution of children, young people, people with disabilities, their families and carers in individual and service planning, implementation and evaluation. This contribution provides a benefit to ONCALL and also empowers individuals to take an active role in decision-making and to influence change.

ONCALL:

- applies the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum of public participation approach in determining participation and engagement approaches maximising opportunities for individual empowerment and contribution
- ensures the provision of regular opportunities such as resident meetings, client surveys, feedback and complaints that are promoted as positive opportunities for individuals to express their views, be considered and responded to
- provides appropriate training, support and/or advocacy to ensure opportunities for contribution and engagement are inclusive and accessible and an opportunity for building individual capabilities
- works with industry experts such as ChildWise, Create Foundation, Australian Federation of Disability Organisation and VALiD to support best practice engagement to maximise the empowerment of individuals
- promotes and supports the role of the ONCALL Ambassadors as a key liaison between clients, staff, the Board and the Executive. ONCALL support includes identifying and making appropriate adjustments and providing capacity-building for clients/residents to undertake an Ambassador position
- collects data and regularly reviews the effectiveness of the processes and outcomes of client engagement, participation and empowerment

Community Focus of Empowerment

ONCALL supports active participation, and contributions to social and civic life as foundations to, and expressions of individual empowerment.

ONCALL:

- works with other service providers, businesses and the broader community to increase the opportunities for children, young people and people with a disability to actively contribute to and exert influence in social and civic life
- leads by example in demonstrating and promoting practices which empower individuals (such as the Ambassador role/s)
- prioritises procurement from social enterprises that fosters employment of people with a disability and other vulnerable groups
- ensures tailored strategies that promote community and cultural connection and contribution for children, young people and people with a disability who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, from culturally and linguistically diverse communities or LGBTQI

Advocacy

Advocacy is the process of standing beside, before or behind an individual or group and speaking out on their behalf to protect and promote their rights and interests. Advocacy enhances individual capacity building and leadership and promotes social inclusion, equality, and social justice.

Disability Advocacy

Disability advocacy upholds ‘the rights and interests of people with all types of disabilities, by addressing instances of discrimination, abuse and neglect.’² Disability advocacy may be by way of:

² National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP)

- **citizen advocacy:** matches people with disability with volunteers. This may include peer advocates.
- **family advocacy:** helps parents and family members advocate on behalf of the person with disability for a particular issue.
- **individual advocacy:** upholds the rights of individual people with disability by working on discrimination, abuse and neglect.
- **legal advocacy:** upholds the rights and interests of individual people with disability by addressing the legal aspects of discrimination, abuse and neglect.
- **self-advocacy:** supports people with disability to advocate for themselves, or as a group.
- **systemic advocacy:** seeks to remove barriers and address discrimination to ensure the rights of people with disability.³

Children and Young People Advocacy

Youth advocacy is the process of identifying, understanding, and addressing issues that are important to young people. It has a strong empowerment and change focus. Youth advocacy adheres to the same principles and takes similar forms to disability advocacy.

ONCALL Commitments

ONCALL values the important role that advocacy plays to ensure that individuals' rights and interests are respected and realised.

ONCALL will:

- encourage and respect the rights of any child, young person, or person with a disability to use an informal or formal advocate of their choice
- provide information in an appropriate format and support to access advocacy services:
 - at service intake
 - if a service has been denied
 - when a person wishes to make a complaint about a service
 - when a team member believes an advocate may be beneficial to an individual
 - when a person requests an advocate
- make efforts to ensure that information about advocacy services is appropriate to the cultural, language, age and/or unique identity of the person
- respect an individual's rights to change or cancel advocates at any time
- promote and facilitate the development of self-advocacy skills and supported decision-making to enable individuals to speak up for their rights, interests and decisions
- pay due attention to the voice of the individual as expressed by the advocate
- actively participate and act as a role model in partnerships and networks that advocate for an improved environment, services and systems on behalf of children, young people and people with a disability

Breaches of this Policy

The breach of this policy by a team member, director or officer of the company may lead to disciplinary action being taken in accordance with the company's disciplinary procedure. Serious breaches may be regarded as gross misconduct.

All team members, directors and officers of the company will be expected to cooperate fully in any investigation into suspected breaches of this policy or any related processes or procedures. If an issue is identified with a

³ National Disability Advocacy Program - <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/disability-and-carers/program-services/for-people-with-disability/national-disability-advocacy-program-ndap>

supplier, we will work with them to prepare a corrective action plan and resolve all violations within an agreed upon time period. We reserve the right to terminate our relationship with individuals and organisations in our supply chain if they breach this policy.

Definitions

ADVOCACY	<p>The process of standing beside, before or behind an individual or group and speaking out on their behalf to protect and promote their rights and interests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Informal Advocacy:</i> when people like parents, friends, family members or agencies speak out and advocate for individuals • <i>Formal Advocacy:</i> a professional with explicit authority to represent another's interests
CAPACITY	<p>A person who has capacity is able to make decisions about things that affect their daily life. The person can understand a decision, the choices involved, the consequences to themselves and others and can communicate their choice</p> <p>Capacity is decision specific and can change over time. A person may lack capacity in one or some areas of decision-making but not all. A person may need assistance with some parts or types of decision-making. This does affect their capacity to make a decision</p>
COMMUNITY INCLUSION	<p>Being connected to other people in a way that is meaningful to the individual and gives a sense of belonging and being valued. Community inclusion is created through social and everyday interactions in a range of environments, including social activities, paid or volunteer work, activities with others such as yoga or playing sport, everyday exchanges with people in the community, and attending events and activities</p> <p>Community may be a geographic area where a person lives, a community of interest, of friends, or an online community</p>
EMPOWERMENT	<p>Having an active and central role in decision-making and having the opportunity to serve as an agent of change</p>
DIGNITY OF RISK	<p>Autonomy and self-determination used by a person when making decisions, including the choice to take some risks in life</p>
PARTICIPATION	<p>Joining with others in doing something</p>
SUPPORTED DECISION-MAKING	<p>When a person with a disability who has complex needs, cognitive and/or communication requirements, is assisted to understand, consider and communicate their choice</p> <p>With supporting decision making the choice ultimately remains the decision of the person with a disability</p>

Related Documents

[Policy, Procedure, Manual](#)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy
Client Charter

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Policy
 Decision-Making and Choice Policy
 Dignity of Risk Policy
 Support Planning Policy
 Working with Families Policy

Legislation

United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
 Australia’s Disability Strategy 2021-2031
 National Standards for Disability Services December 2013, Australian Government Department of Social Services
 NDIS Practice Standards and Quality Indicators November 2021, NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission
 The NDIS Code of Conduct
 NDIA Engagement Framework, March 2022
 Spectrum of Public Participation, The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)
 Disability Advocacy, Department of Social Security, Government of Australia
 National Disability Advocacy Framework, Department of Social Security, Government of Australia

Victoria

Child Safe Standards
 Empowerment and Participation, Commission for Children and Young People
 Human Service Standards Policy October 2021, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (Victoria)
 Disability Service Safeguards Code of Conduct, Victorian Disability Worker Commission

Document Control

Approval and Review

DOCUMENT OWNER	Audit, Compliance and Risk Management Committee (ACRM)		
APPROVAL DATE	November 2023	REVIEW DATE	November 2025

Access and Feedback

This policy will be made available to all staff on the ONCALL intranet and ONCALL database (Periscope), and to directors in the ONCALL Board orientation.

Users should provide comments and feedback on the accuracy, currency, and useability of the policy document to AskQualityVic@oncall.com.au.