

Policy Advocacy

Policy Statement

BeyondHousing provides advocacy services to ensure the rights of people are upheld and promoted. We encourage people to access an advocate who can work with them to ensure their rights and interests are respected and understood. We recognise that people have the right to self-advocate if they choose and will support them by providing information and specialist knowledge to assist. Through the Strategic Plan, BeyondHousing will conduct advocacy campaigns at a regional, state, and national level to raise awareness about homelessness and bring about changes that will benefit the community.

Policy Application

This policy applies to all BeyondHousing employees and includes all permanent and casual staff, volunteers, work experience students, management, and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). For the purposes of this document, all parties will be referred to throughout this policy as workplace participants.

Responsibility & Authority

- The Board of BeyondHousing has responsibility for ensuring compliance with legal and regulatory requirements at a Governance level.
- This policy is operational and therefore the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is responsible for ensuring:
 - Appropriate and effective policies and systems are in place to operationalise legal and regulatory requirements and therefore implement this policy in accordance with that responsibility.
 - All managers and workplace participants are aware of this policy
 - Provide support for workplace participants to undertake their responsibilities under this policy
- The CEO may delegate specific responsibility to managers or workplace participants to ensure that the objectives relating to this policy are met.
- Managers and Team Leaders are responsible to inform workplace participants about their responsibilities under this policy.
- All workplace participants are responsible to familiarise themselves with this policy and comply with its requirements.

Policy Detail

BeyondHousing values include Advocacy, Fairness, Innovation, Quality and Collaboration as part of our purpose of Ending Homelessness.

There are different types of advocacy as outlined below:

1. Personal advocacy – Occurs after an assessment is completed and both the client and the workplace participant believe advocacy is required to assist a client in negotiating with another organisation or professional body to negotiate a positive outcome for the client
2. Service advocacy – Private or meeting-based advocacy carried out by all workplace participants on behalf of clients to achieve individual outcomes or to further policy or procedure improvements.
3. Strategic advocacy – Private or meeting based advocacy carried out by authorised representatives of BeyondHousing in support of our strategic plan and to further policy and procedure improvements.
4. Public Advocacy – Advocacy carried out by authorised representatives of BeyondHousing using public channels or forums including the media, publications, conferences, and online communications.

BeyondHousing will demonstrate the value of advocacy by:

- Identifying the organisation's advocacy priorities and remain responsive to emerging opportunities.
- Supporting all workplace participants to advocate effectively with their direct stakeholders to support improved policies, procedures, and client outcomes.

- Advocating effectively with Government, the community sector, and other stakeholders to improve long-term outcomes, policy, processes, and systems.
- Advocating effectively in the public arena for identified reforms and in support of broader social change outcomes.
- Ensuring clients can access an advocate, legal advice, or other independent support of their choice to assist with access, planning of their needs, making decisions and choices, and making a complaint or lodging an appeal.
- Ensuring workplace participants have access to a list of relevant advocacy services.

Guidelines

The purpose of advocacy is to empower clients and influence decisions and choices which affect their lives and exercise their human rights. **Advocacy should be offered to a client when they are unable to advocate on their own behalf, in situations involving:**

- A dispute with another service
- A client who believes that they have not received a service or response that should have been provided from another service.
- A client who requires advocacy assistance in formally appealing a decision of another service
- Require assistance with negotiation with a company regarding a bill i.e., developing a payment plan.
- Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) Advocacy – legislation relating to housing is often difficult to understand and interpret, therefore specialist advocacy may be required even for people who are otherwise capable of advocating for themselves.

Determining clients who are unable to advocate on their own behalf

BeyondHousing advocates for those clients who are unable to advocate on their own behalf rather than provide a universal advocacy service. A client may be assessed as having a reduced capacity to advocate for themselves or being vulnerable and/or disadvantaged. This may include:

- A person's overall mental and physical capacities
- A person's circumstances e.g., issues of age, English proficiency, disability, experiences etc.
- Risk factors - family violence, drug, and alcohol, etc.
- Disadvantages - persistent circumstances or conditions that the client cannot change (e.g., mental health) or cannot easily change (e.g., educational attainment)

Workplace participants will:

- Stand behind their client by providing advice, guidance and support that empowers them to state their rights and achieve their goals.
- Stand beside clients by assisting them to effectively raise and address their issues, complaints, or concerns.
- Stand before clients by providing representation which defends and promotes their rights and interests.
- Recognise and avoid potential conflicts of interest:
 - The ability to recognise, avoid and resist potential conflicts of interest is critical to safeguarding the integrity of advocacy.
 - Workplace participants must safeguard the client's rights against the interference or undue influence of third-party interests – including family members, professionals, service providers and others, no matter how well intentioned they might be.
 - Recognise and resist misrepresentation by third-party interests which might conflict with the client's rights.
 - Recognise and avoid personal views, opinions or beliefs which might represent a potential conflict of interest.
- Encourage and support people to actively contribute to the resolution of their housing issue.
- Ensure clients are fully aware of information, actions, decisions, relevant legislation, and policies that may impact on their housing situation.
- Offer all people who present for a service access to an advocate/support person or information about how to access an external advocate. At the client's request, BeyondHousing will postpone an appointment until an advocate or support person is present.


- Ensure that clients are provided with all options available to them when participating in advocacy services and follow the course of action determined by them, providing that course of action is within BeyondHousing policies and procedures together with funding guidelines and legislation.
- Ensure clients are made aware of how to provide feedback or make a complaint about advocacy services either internally or via an external organisation.
- Will not disclose or exchange information to any individual or organisation without the informed consent of the client accessing our service and may only disclose or exchange information that directly relates to their housing issue.
- Ensure a duty of care to the client, their household and other BeyondHousing staff will be maintained throughout the provision of advocacy services.
- Inform clients and potential advocates (including verbally and in writing) about their right to use an advocate and the role of an advocate when the client is:
 - Assessed or re-assessed for services
 - Refused a service
 - They want to make a complaint about the service
 Or if:
 - A workplace participant believes an advocate may be beneficial to the client.

Definitions

Advocacy	the process of promoting, supporting, and representing the rights and interests of people. It also involves the protection of an individual's rights and interests to obtain justice. Advocacy can involve acting, speaking, or responding on behalf of the person to ensure they have access to and receive services that meet their individual needs, and that respects their right to choose.
Advocate	a person who supports or represents a client with regard to a particular issue, ensuring that their interests and rights are given proper consideration.

Related

Document Reference	Document Type
Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)	Legislation
Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)	Legislation
Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)	Legislation
Housing Act 1983 (Vic)	Legislation
Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (Vic)	Legislation
Access and Equity	Policy
Case Management	Policy
Child Safety and Wellbeing	Policy
Compliments and Complaints	Policy
Diversity	Policy
Homelessness Assistance	Policy
Privacy and Confidentiality	Policy
Rights and Responsibility	Policy
Stakeholder Participation	Policy
Rental Agreement Management	Policy
Engaging Clients	Procedure
Feedback and Complaints	Procedure
BeyondHousing Feedback Form	Other
Tenancy Plus – tenancy support program operational guidelines	Other
Homelessness Services Guidelines & Conditions of Funding May 2014	Other

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