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Advocacy



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The process of supporting or acting on behalf of a cause, facilitating equal community access and participation of individuals or groups that have typically been socially and/or economically marginalized. There are several types of advocacy to include:

Systems advocacy: the process in which any system (public, private, community based) is made more responsive to the needs of the individual served by the system. This process may include increasing awareness of services and resources available within a community, identifying unmet needs of individuals, identifying existing barriers that impede access to community services and resources, and developing strategies to eliminate legislative, regulatory, social and economic barriers that may impede access to one's community supports and resources.

Individual advocacy: the process of increasing awareness of unmet needs and procuring rights or benefits on behalf of another individual or group of individuals.

Self-advocacy: the process of empowering an individual to rely upon him or herself to make his/her own choices and decisions in order to direct the course of his/her life.

The People First movement of the 1970s was a progenitor of self-advocacy as a civil rights

movement. The independent living movement engaged in systems advocacy and also fostered self-advocacy, providing a foundation for self-advocacy activism in which people with significant disabilities had a right to live in an accessible community of their choice. A core service of Centers of Independent Living is individual and systems advocacy, including providing opportunities for skill development in self-advocacy. The Protection and Advocacy (P&A) System protects the rights of people with disabilities by providing legal representation and other advocacy services associated with state and federal laws. P&A Offices exist in each state.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Americans with Disabilities Act](#)
- ▶ [Independent Living](#)

References and Readings

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- Wehmeyer, M. L. (2004). Self-determination and the empowerment of people with disabilities. *American Rehabilitation, 28*, 22–29.