

Advocacy

ADRC Operations Manual

I. Introduction

Advocacy, which is public support for or recommendation of a particular cause, is a required function of an aging and disability resource center (ADRC). There are many different ways and degrees to which ADRCs may engage in advocacy-related activities. ADRCs have a responsibility to advocate on behalf of their customers as well as a responsibility to advocate more broadly on issues related to aging or living with a disability. Educating the public about specific causes, policies, or issues related to aging or living with a disability is a common way that ADRCs engage in advocacy. The ADRC governing board also plays a key role in advocacy.

ADRCs serve the largest growing demographic of people in Wisconsin. ADRCs see firsthand the impact that programs and services, or lack thereof, have on older people and adults with disabilities. This is what positions ADRCs so well to advocate on issues and concerns important to older people and adults with disabilities.

II. Requirements for Advocacy

A. Informing People of Their Rights and Responsibilities

The ADRC must inform customers of their rights and responsibilities, including their rights to ombudsman services, in ways that they can understand and use. The ADRC must also provide customers with DHS information, as applicable, on the rights an individual has for long-term care services and benefits, rights to self-advocate, and available independent advocacy services.

B. Helping People Resolve Disputes and Referring Them to Advocates

The ADRC must provide assistance to customers when they need help in understanding how to resolve service system disputes or violation of rights grievances. The ADRC must link customers with appropriate advocacy resources, including but not limited to elder and disability benefit specialists, Board on Aging and Long Term Care ombudsman, the Family Care/IRIS ombudsman at Disability Rights Wisconsin, independent living centers, aging units, mental health and substance use disorder advocates, the Title VII Client Assistance Program, volunteer and peer support, and other state or local organizations that provide advocacy for older people and adults with disabilities, where available.

C. Cooperating with Client Advocates

The ADRC must cooperate with any advocate selected by the long-term care program participant, including the Board on Aging and Long Term Care ombudsman and the Family Care/IRIS ombudsman. Any information sharing with client advocates must be done in a manner that is consistent with the [Confidentiality Policy](#) (P-02923-06).

D. Advocating Directly on Behalf of Individuals and Groups

The ADRC must advocate on behalf of the individuals and groups that constitute their target population when necessary services are not adequately provided within the service delivery system. Required advocacy activities include:

- Intervention by an ADRC staff person on behalf of a customer to ensure that they receive the benefits and services for which they are eligible.
- Facilitation of a customer's self-advocacy by an ADRC staff person to motivate and support the customer in obtaining information, opportunities, respect, and recognition to which they are entitled, and in obtaining the services for which they are eligible.
- Efforts by the ADRC to identify and address community conditions, structures, or institutions that function as barriers to essential community services.

E. Lobbying Restrictions

Lobbying is defined as seeking to influence or persuade a politician or public official on an issue. ADRCs are subject to federal restrictions on lobbying under 31 U.S.C. § 1352. In addition, state ADRC funding may not be used for lobbying activities. Lobbying activities are distinct from advocacy activities, which are required of ADRCs under Wisconsin statute and administrative code.

III. Operational Policies and Procedures

A. Statutory References

[Wis. Stat. § 46.283](#)

[Wis. Stat. § 46.80](#)

[Wis. Admin. Code ch. DHS 10](#)

[Older Americans Act of 1965](#)

B. Agency Requirements

ADRCs are required to engage in advocacy-related activities that support the target populations they serve. ADRC governing boards are also required to advocate on behalf of older people and adults with disabilities.

ADRCs must make their complaint policy and procedures readily available to customers. When performing eligibility determinations for public programs, ADRCs must also inform customers of their appeal rights and when they have the right to request a fair hearing.

C. Allowable Funding Source(s)

ADRC grant (*link pending*)

D. Policy Requirements

[ADRC Complaint Policy](#) (P-02923-02)

[Appeal Policy for Adverse Benefit Determinations](#) (P-02923-01)

[Confidentiality Policy](#) (P-02923-06)

IV. Additional Resources and Tools

[Aging and Disability Professionals Association of Wisconsin](#) (ADPAW)

[Disability Rights Wisconsin](#)

[Board on Aging and Long Term Care](#)