



### **Four Steps to Successful Self-Advocacy**

***Disclaimer: The following is intended for use as general information and is prepared for purposes of convenience only. It is not to be relied upon as legal advice or legal authority. If you have inquiries as to legal proceedings, or if you would like more detailed information regarding legislation, you should consult a lawyer.***

#### ***What is self-advocacy?***

- Self-advocacy is advocacy that you undertake directly to achieve a specific goal or outcome for yourself (To learn more about self-advocacy, see our InfoGuide on Self-Advocacy).

#### ***What are the steps to successful self-advocacy?***

- Successful self-advocacy involves planning, preparation, research and knowing when to reach out for support. It also involves knowing about your legal rights and entitlements and what results you are trying to achieve. To help create a self-advocacy strategy, consider the following steps:

#### ***Step 1: Define the problem***

- Begin your work by defining the problem and coming up with a clear, concise and factual issue statement. A clear issue statement will assist you in telling others about the problem and why it's significant. Give enough information so that the issue can be easily understood but not so much information that people lose interest.

The following questions may assist you in defining the problem:

1. What happened?
2. When and where did it happen?
3. Who was involved? Did anyone witness what happened?
4. Has the problem happened before to you? How was it resolved that time?
5. Do other people have the same problem? Have they made a complaint?

### ***Step 2: Develop an action plan***

- Now that you have defined the problem, it's important to develop an action plan that will help you work to resolve it. Your action plan should be broken down into manageable steps. Remember to work towards a solution that fits your problem and is achievable.
- You may want to begin by doing some research to find out more information about your issue and the range of options available to you. This will help you set realistic goals that improve your chances of success.
- It's important to know where or with whom you should first raise your issue so that you contact the most appropriate person at the beginning. It is often helpful to start with the decision maker closest to the issue, as you work your way up through the various levels of decision-making. Don't escalate your issue too soon.

Here are some more questions to ask yourself:

1. What resolution do I hope to achieve?
2. What are the steps in my plan?
3. Who will be involved in my plan?
4. How will I carry out my plan and tell others about it?
5. Who can I turn to for guidance and advice?

**Step 3: Carry out the action plan**

- Implementing the action plan will be perhaps the most difficult and stressful part of the process. It will involve putting your issue forward and getting people to listen to you. It will also involve listening to others and negotiating with them to resolve your problem. It is important to be aware of your personal communication style and approach and to remain open and flexible.
- There may be times when you will agree with the other party and come to a decision quickly. At other times, you may disagree and reaching a decision will require some work. You may experience negative feelings when you encounter resistance or disagree with others on how to address your problem. However, remember to stay positive and to treat others like you would want to be treated. Do not lose sight of your goals, keeping in mind why your issue should be resolved and how others might also benefit from it. Carrying out your action plan may be stressful, so try to identify in advance who you may turn to for support.

Answering the following questions may help you carry out your action plan:

1. Have you documented your actions and made copies of important paperwork?
2. Have you recorded the names of persons with whom you spoke and the date?
3. Are you clear about the next steps and who is responsible for doing specific tasks?
4. Do you need to take your issue to someone at a higher level of authority? To whom?

**Step 4: Evaluate the results**

- So, it's over and hopefully you were successful. But wait, you are not quite done yet because it's important to evaluate the process. You should ask yourself the tough questions about what didn't work so well and why it didn't. This critical evaluation of the process can provide you with valuable information that you can incorporate into your next action plan and contribute to positive outcomes in the future.

During this last phase, you want to ask yourself these questions:

1. Did you achieve the outcome you wanted?
  2. What worked really well?
  3. What didn't work so well?
  4. How do you feel about the outcome?
- Self-advocacy is a learning process and not everything will go as planned but don't let that stop you from moving forward. Learn as you go, celebrate your successes and see even the smallest changes toward your goal as positive. You will be empowered by standing up for your rights, and may find that becoming a strong advocate for yourself will make an important contribution to your well-being.

### ***Questions?***

Contact your local PPAO Patient Advocate or Rights Adviser or contact the Central Office at 1-800-578-2343. Visit our website at [www.ppao.gov.on.ca](http://www.ppao.gov.on.ca) for information about patients' rights.