



Policy Choice and Advocacy

Endorsed by: CEO

Document Owner: Support Services

Section 1: Preamble

Goulburn Options is committed to respecting and protecting the legal and human rights of all individuals. Goulburn Options recognises each participant's choice and control over their own lives and offers supports based on a person-centred model. Goulburn Options seeks to include each participant in all service, and support decisions which impact them.

Goulburn Options supports the right of participants to use an advocate of their choice to negotiate on their behalf when necessary. This may be in relation to assessment, reviews, complaints or any other communication between the participant and Goulburn Options. Goulburn Options will work co-operatively with any advocate nominated by a participant and treat them with respect.

Goulburn Options is also committed to providing participants with advocacy and support when it is requested.

Section 2: Policy Statement

At Goulburn Options participant decision making and choice is supported by the following:

- A person-centred approach in service delivery; placing the participant's right to self-determination at the centre of decision-making processes; including keeping the participant informed of choices, opportunities, and potential limitations so they can make informed choices, including a dignity of risk decision;
- Collaboration with and support for the individual participant to participate in decisions that affect their lives through their involvement in the planning, provision, management, and evaluation of services they receive;
- Making sure decision-making processes support the participant's right to involve family members, carers and other elected supports including an advocate;
- Considering the cultural/language needs of participants, their families/carers and support networks;
- Facilitating access to advocacy within Goulburn Options as requested or when necessary. Where Goulburn Options is unable to provide advocacy, participants are provided with information or referred to alternative service options; and
- Providing information to participants in accessible communication formats

Goulburn Options supports advocacy in the form of:

- Individual advocacy to uphold the rights and interest of participants on a one-to-one basis in addressing instances of discrimination, abuse and neglect and providing feedback to Goulburn Options for improved services and practice. This may take the form of peer support, leadership mentoring or coaching, training and development, counselling, and occasional casework

- Systemic advocacy to influence positive, long-term changes that remove barriers and address discriminatory practices to ensure the dignity of participants are upheld
- Self-advocacy supports participants to advocate for themselves on a one-to-one or group basis. This may take the form of peer support, leadership mentoring or coaching, training and development, collaborating with peers to form groups and providing advice.

Advocacy and empowerment support for Goulburn Options participants is provided across all services.

In individual advocacy, participants receive non-legal, issue-based advocacy support, including advice on care concerns relating to discrimination, access, and resources. Goulburn Options takes direction from the participant and works together to resolve any issues which may arise. In instances where advocacy and empowerment support cannot be facilitated, the participant is offered external referral.

Goulburn Options participants are also engaged in systemic advocacy through their participation in Participant Voice Committee meetings, which are also attended by the CEO and Goulburn Options Board Chair. Within this context participants seek to introduce and influence longer term changes to Goulburn Options, and positive impacts on both Goulburn Options' service delivery, and their own individual quality of life.

2.1 Children and Young People

Goulburn Options actively seeks to empower all children and young people engaged in our service. In line with the Victorian Child Safe Standards, we are committed to creating an environment where every child feels safe, respected, heard, and supported to speak up and make decisions about their lives.

We recognise that children and young people have unique needs, perspectives, and rights—including the right to be involved in decisions that affect them. Our workforce supports children to express their views freely, in ways that are appropriate to their age and communication style, and ensures those views are genuinely considered.

Goulburn Options also respects and encourages children and young people to involve trusted adults, family members, peers, cultural leaders, or other people of significance in their lives when making choices or raising concerns. This may include support to engage with their community, advocacy services, or someone they identify as safe and supportive. Goulburn Options recognises that a strong sense of belonging, and connectedness enhances a child's confidence to speak up and have their voice heard.

Upholding our Code of Conduct, all staff are expected to listen without judgement, foster a culture of inclusion, and protect children's rights to agency and participation. We provide clear information about supports, encourage self-advocacy, and respond quickly and respectfully when children raise concerns or ask for help.

Section 3: Roles

Role	Responsibilities and Accountabilities
Board	Support systemic advocacy, ensure governance and accountability in advocacy processes.
Executive Management	Oversee the implementation of advocacy support services, ensure compliance with person-centred practices, and allocate resources for advocacy.
Team Leaders	Ensure staff are trained in supporting participant advocacy, facilitate advocacy within teams, and ensure participants are aware of their rights and options.
Administration	Maintain records of participant advocacy requests, referrals, and support, ensuring accessible communication and follow-up.
Workforce (<i>DSW, Students, Volunteers</i>)	Support participants in making informed decisions, provide individual and self-advocacy support, and refer participants to external advocacy services when necessary.
Participants	Actively engage in advocacy, including making decisions regarding advocacy support, participating in systemic advocacy through the Participant Voice Committee, and seeking support when necessary.

Section 4: Related Documentation

Document Name	Document Type
Participant Enquiry Form	Form
Participant Intake Form	Form
Participant Intake and Onboarding	Procedure
Individual Planning and Outcomes	Policy
Goal Monitoring	Procedure
Service Access	Policy
Protecting and Promoting Human Rights	Policy
Code of Conduct	Policy
Participant Handbook	Handbook
Participant Service Charter	Information
Complaints and Feedback	Policy
Complaints and Feedback	Procedure
Complaints and Feedback Register	Register
Complaints and Feedback Pamphlet	Form
Child Safety and Wellbeing	Policy

Section 5: Definitions

Term	Definition
Choice and Control	Under the NDIS, choice and control is a term used to give participants power over the pursuit of personal goals, and the planning, engagement and delivery of supports. This means participants have choice and control over where, when and by whom the supports and services they need are provided.

Dignity of Risk	Dignity of Risk is a term used to recognise that all participants have the right to take risks, learn from their experiences, and use this experience in future decisions. This means making decisions where the outcome is not clear. Dignity of Risk is recognised as an important aspect of building the decision-making abilities of participants.
Advocacy	Advocacy is a process that supports a participant's voice, including but not limited to: • Promoting and protecting legal and human rights; • Empowering disadvantaged individuals and groups; • Increasing an individual or group's control over goods and services; • Being responsive to, and emphasising, an individual or group's needs and wishes; • Challenging stereotypes and stigma; • Overcoming barriers that restrict opportunities; • Supporting an appropriate societal and service delivery response to individuals or groups; and • Supporting a better quality of life for a person or group.
Advocate/Support Person	An advocate or support person is a person nominated by the participant to promote the rights of the participant and communicate their views and preferences. An advocate may attend meetings with the participant and help them raise issues or complaints with a service provider. The advocate or support person takes direction from the participants and does not override their choices or decisions.
Victorian Child Safe Standards	The Victorian Child Safe Standards are a set of mandatory requirements designed to protect children and young people from abuse in organisations that provide services to them. They aim to create environments where children feel safe, respected, and valued. The Standards focus on promoting child safety, preventing harm, empowering children, and embedding child safety into the everyday practice, culture, and governance of organisations.

Date of Last Review:	May 2025	Date of Next Review:	May 2027
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