

Vision, mission and values

All activities managed or supported by OPA are guided by OPA's vision, mission and values.

OPA has a vision of a just and inclusive society that values, respects, protects and promotes the dignity and human rights of all people.

The mission is to uphold the rights and interests of people with a disability and work to eliminate abuse, neglect and exploitation.

OPA strives to demonstrate the following in all activities and relationships:

Respect - treat everyone equally and with dignity and justice, accept each person's individuality, acknowledge diversity and promote self determination

Compassion - accept people as they are and understand, acknowledge and have empathy for their circumstances

Inclusiveness - strive to empower all people to contribute and participate

Ethical behaviour - act at all times in a principled and informed manner, treat people fairly, accept accountability and uphold justice

Independence - be free-thinking, unbiased and impartial, and challenge the status quo.

"The Office of the Public Advocate works hand in hand with a wide range of government organisations and community groups to protect the human rights of people with a disability or mental illness, and ensure they are socially included in Victorian society."

Colleen Pearce, Public Advocate



How to access OPA's services

Call 1300 309 337
TTY 9603 9529
Fax 1300 787 510
Visit Level 5, 436 Lonsdale St, Melbourne
Mail PO Box 13175, Law Courts, Victoria
See www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au



The OPA Advice Service provides information and responds to requests relating to services provided by OPA.

Call the Advice Service and request to speak to a representative from any of the program areas, including:

- Advocate/Guardians
- Community Guardianship Program
- Community Visitors Program
- Independent Third Person Program
- Community Education
- Communications
- Policy and Research

OPA provides a range of publications and forms. These can be requested by calling the Advice Service, and are available at www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au

Bulk orders of *Take Control: a kit for making powers of attorney and guardianship*, as well as a selection of other publications, are available from Victorian Legal Aid at www.legallaid.vic.gov.au

Office of the Public Advocate
Level 5, 436 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne Victoria 3000.
PO Box 13175 Law Courts Victoria 8010. DX 210293
Tel: 1300 309 337 Fax: 1300 787 510
www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au



Office of the Public Advocate

Working to promote the rights and dignity of people with a disability



What is the Office of the Public Advocate?

The Office of the Public Advocate (OPA) is an independent statutory body established by the Victorian State Government, working to protect and promote the interests, rights and dignity of people with a disability.

The vision and values of OPA are to work towards a just and inclusive society that values, respects, protects and promotes the dignity and human rights of all people.

OPA provides a number of services, including advocacy and guardianship as well as support for private guardians; an advice service for enquiries about matters such as powers of attorney, guardianship, and consent to medical and dental treatment; and supports three volunteer programs.

OPA advocates for broader improvements to the lives of people with a disability through the development of policy and research, as well as through targeted communications to a range of stakeholders.

OPA works closely with the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT), Victoria Legal Aid (VLA), and other government and community organisations.



The first Public Advocate, Ben Bodna, was assisting his son with a school project on flags, when he found that code flag F of the International Flag Code used by ships at sea meant 'I am disabled, communicate with me'. As a result, code flag F became OPA's logo in 1987..

What services does OPA provide?

Advice and information

OPA provides advice and information relating to the rights of people with a disability, their treatment and care; VCAT applications; administration and guardianship; enduring powers of attorney and enduring guardianship; and consent to medical and dental treatment.

Advice and information is available from:

- the Advice Service on 1300 309 337 (local call cost)
- www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au
- educational presentations
- publications including fact sheets, guides and brochures.



Advocacy

OPA advocates for people with a cognitive disability or mental illness who are at serious risk of abuse, exploitation or neglect. OPA focuses on providing limited, or last resort advocacy to find solutions that are in the best interests of the person.

Guardianship

OPA provides a range of guardianship services for people with a disability. Guardians, appointed by VCAT, are responsible for making decisions that are in the best interests of the person with a disability who they are representing.

In some cases, VCAT appoints the Public Advocate as guardian for adults with a cognitive disability (which includes intellectual disability, acquired brain injury, dementia, or chronic mental illness). The Public Advocate may then delegate that guardianship to an advocate/guardian from the Community Guardianship Program, one of three volunteer programs managed by OPA.

OPA also provides support for family and friends appointed as private guardians.

Community Visitors Program

Community Visitors are volunteers who work with OPA to help protect and advocate for the rights of people with a disability.

Community Visitors are empowered by law to visit Victorian accommodation facilities for people with a disability or mental illness at any time, unannounced, and monitor and report on the adequacy of services provided, in the interests of residents and patients.

Community Visitors visit community residential units, supported residential services and mental health facilities, and talk to residents/patients to ensure they are being cared for with dignity and respect.

Independent Third Person Program

An Independent Third Person (ITP) is a volunteer trained by OPA to assist people with a cognitive disability or mental illness during interviews or when making formal statements to Victoria Police.

ITPs provide support to both adults and young people with a cognitive disability or mental illness. They may be alleged offenders, victims or witnesses

ITPs help facilitate communication and ensure that a person with a cognitive disability or mental illness is not disadvantaged during the police process.

Community Guardianship Program

Community guardians are volunteers appointed by the Public Advocate to act as independent guardians for Victorians with a disability.

A community guardian assists a person with a disability to make reasonable personal and lifestyle decisions when that disability prevents them from making decisions themselves.

Community guardians can make decisions about matters such as accommodation, health care and employment. Their core responsibility is to ensure that they act in the best interests of the person they represent.