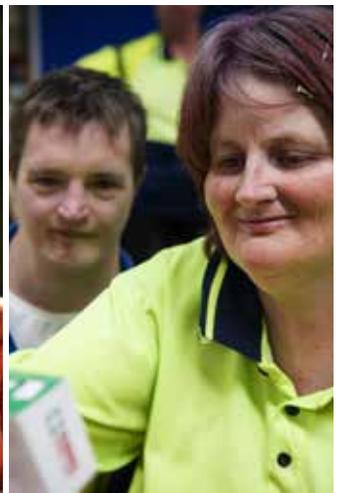




Quality Assurance for Disability Advocacy and Employment Services

Information for people receiving support



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Summary

Disability advocacy agencies and employment service providers for people with disability (service providers), funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services, are required to undergo a Quality Assurance audit each year. The purpose of the audit is to show that they are providing the best possible support and meeting the National Standards for Disability Services. This booklet explains the Quality Assurance process and describes what happens when a Quality Assurance audit is conducted.

Quality Assurance

During the audit service providers need to show – among other things – they are providing effective support, managing their operation effectively, avoiding conflicts of interest, employing skilled staff, and managing complaints appropriately.

The audit

The audit involves your service provider completing a self-assessment, and then a visit from an audit team where staff and a range of people receiving their support provide input.

Input from people receiving support

People receiving support have the choice to take part – this is voluntary and a consent process is required. If you decide to take part you have the chance to say how effective the support you have received has been for you. Ways to take part include talking to an audit team member or allowing the audit team to see your file. You can choose whether to do one, both, or neither of these.

You can have assistance from an independent person (for example, a family member, friend, an advocate, or other independent support person) to make the decision about whether or not to take part, and to assist you while talking to the audit team, if needed. It is important that you choose someone who knows you well, but who is not from the service provider being audited.

Outcome

At the end of the audit the audit team makes a decision about whether your service provider can be certified, which is needed in order for them to continue to receive funding. The audit team may make recommendations or requirements about improvements that need to be made before the certificate can be issued.



Introduction

The Department of Social Services is responsible for overseeing Quality Assurance in Australian Government funded disability advocacy agencies and employment services for people with disability (service providers). The Department has a Quality Assurance system to ensure that these organisations provide the best possible services to the people with disability who they support.

In order to be certified, obtain a Certificate of Compliance and receive funding from the Department, every service provider must demonstrate through an independent audit that they meet the National Standards for Disability Services. The audit is concerned with assessing the organisations, not the people accessing their support.

This booklet aims to assist people receiving support to understand the auditing process, the role of the audit team and how they can participate in the audit.

Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance refers to systematic assessment, evaluation and certification processes that ensure that organisations operate at a high standard, providing well managed and effective systems that meet the required outcomes.

For service providers, this operates as an accreditation process, measured against the National Standards for Disability Services; they need to show that they are appropriately implementing the standards.

Important aspects of the Quality Assurance system include ensuring that they:

- provide support that meets the objectives and facilitates the involvement of people with disability
- provide evidence of documentation that shows that they have good management systems, clear policies and the involvement of people with disability and their families/carers
- avoid conflicts of interest and put the needs of people with disability first
- employ staff who have the appropriate skills and training to work effectively with the people with disability they support or assist
- manage complaints against them in a way that ensures that people accessing their support can freely make and have any complaints or disputes resolved.

More information

Further information about the [National Standards for Disability Services](#) can be found online.



The Quality Assurance and auditing process

Quality Assurance for service providers is based on a three year cycle, and involves annual audit visits.

The stages in the process are:

Preparation

- Staff of the service do a self-assessment of their compliance with the National Standards for Disability Services.
- You decide whether or not you want to take part in the audit, and if you do want to, you receive assistance to organise your participation.

Assessment by an audit team

- The service provider is assessed against the National Standards for Disability Services.
- This includes input from people receiving their support (first hand input or permission to access files).
- This also includes input from staff of the organisation.

Certification or period of improvement

- The service provider is either certified or required to make improvements.
- Meeting to discuss the audit findings.
- Report about the audit findings.

These are explained in more detail below.



1. Preparation

Before the audit team's visit, you and your service provider need to prepare for the audit process. This may involve some or all of the following:

- The service provider conducting a self-assessment of their own policies and procedures – you might be asked to assist by discussing how the organisation is working for you, either in person or by providing some written input.
- The service provider informing you of the purpose and timing of the audit.
- You choosing whether or not you wish to participate, with assistance with this decision from an independent person, if needed (see section on 'Assistance' for suggestions of who the independent person could be).
- You being contacted to determine the method and timing of your participation, if you choose to take part.

2. Assessment by the audit team

After the preparation stage has been completed, the next stage of the Quality Assurance process is an assessment by the audit team.

This involves an audit team visiting the service provider at least once a year, for may be one or a few days, depending on how big the organisation is.

Types of audits

An audit must be completed every year. Once every three years there is a certification/re-certification audit, and during the intervening two years there are surveillance audits to check that the service provider continues to comply with the National Standards for Disability Services. Surveillance audits are a smaller scale version of the certification audit.

The audit team

The audit team is from an independent certification body, meaning that no member of the audit team is associated with or linked to your service provider. This is to ensure that the audit team can make a fair and impartial judgement of them.

The team is made up of:

- The lead auditor.
- The consumer technical expert (a person with disability who assists the audit team to understand the experiences of people with disability), and possibly.



- Other auditors (number dependent on the size of your service).

All audit team members have training in the Quality Assurance system and audit process.

The auditing process

During their assessment, the audit team requires input from people receiving support and from the staff of the service. This involves both first-hand input and analysis of documents provided.

The audit team has the following interactions with people receiving support:

- Getting their first-hand input, through verbal or written methods.
- Analysing their files and records.

The audit team has the following interactions with staff of each organisation:

- Analysing information on the organisation's management, usual policies and procedures and funding arrangements.
- Meeting with staff to discuss Quality Assurance in the organisation.

Assessment method

Throughout their interactions with people receiving support and staff of each organisation the audit team is required to assess against Quality Assurance criteria. The criteria align to each of the National Standards for Disability Services.

The audit team rates your service provider based on a three-point scale of how well they are conforming or not conforming to the National Standards for Disability Services.

Your involvement

The audit team does not need to speak to every person receiving support during the audit. You are free to agree or disagree to take part, and free to have an independent person to assist you with making this decision, if needed (see section on 'Assistance' for suggestions of who the independent person could be).

The audit team chooses who will participate from those people who have agreed to take part in the audit. They include people who have different disabilities, ages, cultural backgrounds, living situations and experiences.



Ways to participate

If you do want to participate in the audit there are two main ways for you to do so.

You can provide first-hand input, through one of the following methods (some or all of these methods may be available):

- A face-to-face interview with an audit team member.
- A telephone interview with an audit team member.
- A focus group with other people receiving support.
- A questionnaire and/or feedback form.
- An informal chat with an audit team member about what you think of your service.

You can allow the audit team to see your file with information about you and the support you have received. Please see the section below for information on privacy and use of your information.

Consent, privacy and use of your information

Participation in the Quality Assurance process is voluntary and you are not required to take part if you do not wish to. If you do, the audit team requires you to formally consent to participate; this usually involves signing a consent form, but where this is not possible other ways can be used that are more appropriate.

All information collected from you – whether via first-hand input or from your file – is protected by privacy and confidentiality measures. While your service provider knows who has participated, the audit team does not identify the information that's been collected specifically from you. All information is reported together in a way that does not identify individuals, and no names are included.

If you consent and the audit team does collect information about you from your file, this is treated sensitively, and is used only to assess whether your service provider has sufficiently met each of the National Standards for Disability Services in your specific case. The information is not used for any purpose beyond the audit. All reporting is confidential.

Topics covered by interviews, focus groups or questionnaires

If you contribute first-hand into the Quality Assurance process through any of the written or verbal methods outlined above, the questions are on the following types of topics:



- How satisfied or unsatisfied you are with your service provider, and why.
- Whether you receive the support you want and need from your service provider.
- Whether you have the opportunity to provide input into and make choices about the support you receive.
- Whether you have received accessible information, education, mentoring and effective representation, if needed.
- Whether you have complaints about your service provider, and whether you know the processes for making a complaint.
- What you would change or improve about your service provider.

Assistance

If you need someone to assist you in taking part in the audit, this is permitted. It is important that you choose someone who knows you well, but who is not from the service provider being audited. Some examples of who you could choose include a family member, friend, an advocate from another agency (if you are receiving advocacy support from an agency being audited), or other independent support person.

3. Certification or period of improvement

After the audit team has completed its assessment, they make a decision about whether your service provider is meeting the National Standards for Disability Services, and should be certified. They also communicate their findings in a meeting at the end of the audit and through a written report provided after the audit.

Certification

The audit team makes a decision about whether your service provider should be certified.

If there has been a certification audit and the audit team decides that they comply with the National Standards for Disability Services, your service provider is certified and a Certificate of Compliance is issued. Where there has been a surveillance audit, and they comply with the National Standards for Disability Services, certification is maintained. Suggestions for minor improvements may be offered, but your service provider is not required to change anything. They continue to receive funding from the Department.



If the audit team decides that your service provider does not comply with the National Standards for Disability Services, it outlines what needs to be fixed and gives a deadline of when this needs to occur. Once the problem areas are fixed and they meet the requirements for certification, Departmental funding continues. If the problems are not addressed within the required timeframe your service provider could lose its certification, and its future Departmental funding is at risk.

For people receiving advocacy support or employment services, this means that there is a system in place every year to ensure that improvements are made to the quality and systems by which the supports are conducted. Because a service provider cannot be certified unless it has made all of the necessary improvements, this aims to ensure the best and most appropriate support possible, with a process in place for continuous improvement.

Meeting to present the findings

The audit team holds a meeting at the conclusion of the audit to outline and discuss their findings. Staff from the organisation attends the meeting. You can also choose to attend if you wish to, however this is not compulsory.

The audit team's report

The audit team also writes a report. This report outlines their ratings on each National Standard for Disability Services and their overall assessment. The report outlines the strengths of your service provider, as well as the areas in which improvement is recommended or required. The Department and your service provider receive a copy of this report.



Complaints

All people receiving support have a right to make a complaint either about the conduct of the audit team or about their disability advocacy agency or employment service provider. The contacts below are a starting point for making complaints.

Complaints about the audit team

If you wish to make a complaint about the audit team, you should inform your service provider.

Complaints about your disability advocacy agency or employment service provider

If you wish to make a complaint about your service provider to someone other than your agency or service or the audit team, you could contact:



Complaints Resolution and Referral Service

Phone: 1800 880 052

