**Guide – Advocacy 101**

Advocacy plays an important role in CNIB's mission.by helping to make a more accessible society for people who are blind or partially sighted. CNIB defines advocacy as “persuading a person with influence, the public, businesses, organizations, or the government to change attitudes, policies and/or practices. about an issue.” In other words, advocacy is about trying to make a positive change.

For more information about how we can define advocacy, watch our video [CNIB “What is advocacy?”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rPRQXwJObc)

# **Are you an advocate?**

There are many misconceptions about what an advocate is. Some stereotypes include:

* You must be an angry or loud personality
* You must have training or a degree in public policy or government relations
* You need to take part in direct action (i.e., attend marches, carry signs)
* You must be a professional lobbyist or be well connected to important people

While some of these qualities are helpful, some of them are not (remember, no one likes an angry person!). An effective advocate uses their own skills and resources to navigate systems, build relationships, and create change. However, there are a number of key qualities that hold true for each area of advocacy. They include:

* **Passion:** Caring about the change you want to make
* **Motivation**: Having a sense of drive and desire for change
* **Empowerment**: Feeling confident with yourself and resources to make change. These can include an understanding of your own strengths, the ability to identify potential barriers and accommodations, and knowing your rights.
* **Organization**: You keep notes and have facts and evidence to persuade others

Ask yourself these questions:

* Do you encounter barriers often that you want to fix?
* Do you want to make a change for yourself?
* Do you want to make a change for others?
* Do you want to make a change for society?
* Do you want to alter hearts and minds to break barriers and create equity?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you are an advocate!

# **Why Advocate?**

People advocate for a variety of reasons. Some of these include:

* When their rights or the rights of people the care about aren’t being respected
* When others speak on their behalf
* When an issue is very important to them
* To raise awareness among elected officials, businesses, organizations, decision makers, and the public.
* To create change and find solutions
* To work as part of a team toward a common goal

Some examples of things that people connected to the sight loss community advocate for include:

* Access to information and communication
* Access to public services and spaces
* Changes to publicly available services and spaces
* Changes to attitudes, policies, or procedures
* Accessible technology
* Changes to the built environment

# **Types of Advocacy**

There are four main types of advocacy. Each type can be useful in different situations, and it may even be helpful to use more than one type as you work to advocate towards a specific issue. The most important part is being able to recognize each type and what they might look like when you are advocating. To start, check out [CNIB’s putting advocacy into practice](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3e0Ti5b754&t=2s) video.

## 1. Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy involves speaking up for yourself and what you need. Examples of self-advocacy include letting the teacher know that you need to sit at the front of the class or asking for a document in an accessible format. Even though the same issue may affect others, it is something that you are motivated to change because it affects you personally. Are you a self-advocate? Watch [our self-advocacy video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5RIpTnWmskk) to find out if you’re already taking part in self-advocacy. There’s a good chance you are!

## 2. Systemic advocacy

Systemic advocacy is influencing and changing the way systems operate in ways that will benefit the population. Systemic advocates focus on changes to attitudes, legislation, policies, and practices. Examples of systemic advocacy include Black Lives Matter, the #MeToo Movement, climate change campaigns, and CNIB’s Guide Dog Awareness Month campaign. For more information on CNIB’s systemic advocacy campaigns, visit check out our [CNIB’s systemic advocacy video](https://youtu.be/u2KqrZX025c).

For an up-to-date list of CNIB’s current advocacy campaigns, visit [www.cnib.ca/advocate](http://www.cnib.ca/advocate).

## 3. Third-party Advocacy

Third-party advocacy happens when a person or organization that is not directly involved in the issue represents a person or group in advocating for change. Examples of third-party advocacy include unions, elected representatives, an ombudsman, disability organizations, and municipal accessibility advisory committees. CNIB sometimes gets involved in third-party advocacy, but we prefer to empower people to self-advocate where possible.

## 4. Education and awareness building

Education and awareness building is focused on raising the public’s level of understanding and awareness about a particular issue in order to create change. An example of education and awareness building is [CNIB’s Guide Dog Awareness PSA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMD8IkTlv80).

For further information about raising awareness as part of advocacy, check out our [Top 5 Sight Loss Myths Busted video.](https://youtu.be/_aEvFihIqA8)

# **Intersectionality**

Advocacy works to make positive changes by addressing barriers that individuals face. At CNIB, sight loss is a shared barrier that we are all trying to make changes towards. However, other factors in a person’s life make their experiences and needs unique. Intersectionality is a framework for understanding how a person’s social identities combine to create different forms of discrimination and privilege. Those factors overlap to create a person’s lived experience that can both empower and oppress.

Examples

* Class
* Disability
* Gender identity
* Race
* Immigration status
* Religion

While advocating for the sight loss community, voices from all impacted communities must be included and acknowledged. It is important to recognize and acknowledge that everyone has multiple identities that make them who they are. It also means that an issue can impact individualize in different ways.

# **Resources**

[Diversity and Inclusion: We are CNIB](https://www.cnib.ca/en/support-us/advocate/diversity-inclusion-we-are-cnib)

[CNIB Intersectionality Video Series](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpAOW00xNyyalFL6XkQN_AQqnoPJtscIY)

# **Steps to Self-Advocacy**

There are six steps to effective self-advocacy:

1. Define the issue
2. Define solutions
3. Figure out where to go and what to say
4. Find allies
5. Be mindful of timing
6. Evaluate and follow up

## 1. Define the issue

Defining an advocacy issue isn’t always easy. Your issue may be complicated, or the change that you are looking for may not be straight forward. One of the best ways to begin defining an issue is to simplify it. Assume that the people that can help you are hearing about this issue for the first time and are not familiar with it.

Defining your issue will also ensure that you know what your goal is, and you’ll be able to determine when you’ve succeeded.

Let’s look at two examples of defining an issue and consider which one would be more effective.

**Example 1**

I rely on assistive technology to use the internet and your website is impossible for me to navigate.

**Example 2**

I am a customer who is blind. Yesterday, I went to your website to buy a pair of shoes and I was unable to do so. I use computer software that magnifies text on my computer screen, but the way your website has been built does not allow me to find the checkout button or add items to my shopping cart.

While those within the sight loss community might understand the first example, a small business owner or an individual within a large corporation probably won’t have an in-depth understanding of assistive technology. Notice how clearly defining the issue in a way that could be understood by any audience makes Example 2 much more effective.

The most important question to ask yourself when you are trying to define an issue is, “What is the barrier in attitudes, policies, procedures, or the built environment that is preventing me from accessing what I need?”

As Canadians, we have access to a number of human rights relating to areas of life like employment, education, access to healthcare and housing. If you feel your legal rights are not being met or want to learn more about your legal rights as a person with sight loss, visit the [CNIB Know Your Rights webpage.](https://www.cnib.ca/en/support-us/advocate/know-your-rights)

## 2. Define Solutions

Your issue should have a solution. Effective self-advocacy is highlighting an issue and working together to find a solution. Pointing out problems without considering potential solutions is complaining.

When defining solutions, it is important to be flexible. Considering multiple solutions will enable more options and more opportunity for collaboration than focusing on one stubborn solution.

The best way to define solutions is through research and evidence. You’ll want to make an emotional approach to your problem so that people understand it’s impact, but you’ll need to present solutions backed by solid research and evidence if you want to persuade others. Evidence could include statistics, case studies, best practices, or photos. The important thing is that you present your evidence in a way that is easy to distribute and understand. This will help you to communicate with the media, decision makers, and the public.

Once you’ve defined your solutions and gathered the relevant evidence, you’ll need to put the information into a compelling argument. Think about what people will need to hear to take action. What can you say to persuade them that acting in your favour is good for them, too? How can you position your solutions in a way that benefits everyone?

Let’s revisit our example from the previous section. While a website redesign may fix the accessibility barriers faced by the customer who was trying to purchase a pair of shoes, a small business may lack the resources to overhaul their website in a short timeframe. But this isn’t the only possible solution. Try to think creatively.

**Ask Yourself:**

* What types of evidence already exist that I can use?
* What evidence do I need to gather myself?
* What steps do I need to take to gather this evidence?

## 3. Figure Out Where to Go and What to Say

Once you have identified the problem and defined solutions, you’ll need to figure out who to talk to and what you’ll say to them to persuade them that change needs to happen.

Figuring out where to go can feel like an overwhelming task. Your goal is to find the person who has the authority or resources to address the issue. If your issue is something that is controlled by the government, you’ll need to determine which level of government has jurisdiction over it. You can then figure out who the decision maker is. Governments often have a public directory that you can search to find out who the decision maker is. You can also reach out to your elected officials to get information. For further advice, check out our [guide on how to navigate the Canadian government system](https://www.cnib.ca/sites/default/files/2023-01/How%20to%E2%80%A6navigate%20the%20Canadian%20government%20system_EN.docx).

If the issue is large and involves many stakeholders, you may want to create a list of all the potential decision makers and influencers. This will help you to stay organized.

Ask yourself the following questions:

* Who has the authority to make the change happen?
* Are there any other key players who can influence the decision maker?
* How can you reach those people?

For further tips on how to engage decision makers effectively, check out our [Champions for Change Policy Maker Questions](https://youtu.be/4uPMkG9EQHI) video.

Once you’ve figured out where to go, the next step is figuring out what to say. Try to focus on the three Cs of a good argument: clear, concise, and compelling.

To ensure that your message is clear, concise, and compelling, focus on the following:

* Explain the issue.
* Explain why it is important.
* Explain what can be done to fix the issue.

It may be helpful to make a list of people that you’ll want to call, email, or meet with. Your list could include the person’s name, job title or relevance to your campaign, how you’ll be contacting them, when, with what information, and when you’ll follow up.

For further information on this topic, visit our guides on [how to write a great advocacy letter](https://www.cnib.ca/sites/default/files/2023-02/Guide%20%E2%80%93%20Advocacy%20Letters%20101_EN.docx) and [public speaking for advocacy.](https://www.cnib.ca/sites/default/files/2023-01/Public%20Speaking%20and%20Advocacy%20Guide_EN.docx)

## 4. Find Allies

In most cases, you will not be the first person to advocate on an issue. Reach out to your networks to find out if others have experienced similar issues. Your networks may include your family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, people you volunteer with, people you participate in recreation with, community organizations, disability groups, and citizens of your town or city.

Finding others to join your advocacy efforts means that there are more people dedicated to the cause and to sharing the workload. Having a large group of people or organizations advocating on an issue also makes it easier to attract the attention of the media or decision makers.

To find allies, think about who is impacted by the issue. For example, cluttered sidewalks impact people who are blind or partially sighted, but they also impact people who are wheelchair users and parents with strollers.

Ensure that all who join your campaign understand the goals and key messages. All the organizations and individuals participating in the campaign should be working together toward a common outcome. Review the key messages together and determine which members of your team will reach out to the decision makers and influencers on your list.

For more information on this topic, check out our [How to build strong partnerships guide](https://www.cnib.ca/sites/default/files/2023-01/How%20to%E2%80%A6build%20strong%20advocate%20partnerships_EN.docx).

## 5. Be Mindful of Timing

Your advocacy issue may seem like the most important issue to you, but it is one of many important issues for decision makers. For this reason, it is essential that you understand the climate of the system in which you’re trying to advocate, whether it’s with a local service provider or the federal government. For example, if your advocacy issue falls under the jurisdiction of your municipal government, but there is a mayoral election in a few weeks, you may want to wait until the new mayor is elected before reaching out about your issue.

Think about upcoming milestones that may impact your ability to advocate on the issue, such as awareness days and council meetings. Can you tie your advocacy issue to other milestones, like a budget or election?

If you determine that the timing is right to advocate on the issue, figure out what the timelines of the decision makers are so that you can adequately prepare. If you schedule a meeting with a decision maker, but council has already voted on the issue, your advocacy efforts won’t have an impact on the decision.

## 6. Evaluate and Follow Up

At the start of your advocacy efforts, you had clear goals. You knew what success would look like and how you’d know when you’d achieved it. Now you can celebrate your accomplishments and think about what worked, why it worked, and what you would do differently next time.

Ask yourself the following:

* Was the issue resolved?
* Was your communication clear, concise, and compelling?
* Did allies and stakeholders do what they said they were going to do?
* Which allies and stakeholders do you need to share the outcomes with?
* If the issue was not resolved, is there more information or additional allies that could help you to continue advocating?

If you have any further questions about advocacy or would like further resources, please contact us at [advocacy@cnib.ca](mailto:advocacy@cnib.ca) or visit [www.cnib.ca/advocate](http://www.cnib.ca/advocate).