

# **Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA)**

A guide for professionals



# How advocacy can help

Advocates are independent professionals. Advocates who support people receiving mental health treatment are known as 'Independent Mental Health Advocates' (IMHAs).

## **Their role is to support people to:**

- understand their rights and options
- understand decisions about their treatment
- understand the parts of the Mental Health Act which apply to them
- have their views and wishes heard in decisions about their care or treatment
- raise anything they are unhappy with relating to their care or treatment

Even when someone is not able to tell their advocate what they want, our advocates will use a range of approaches to establish their views and wishes as far as possible and safeguard their rights.

We can provide support over the phone, over a video call or in person.

# Who can get an advocate?

By law, people have the right to speak to an IMHA if they are:

- detained under the Mental Health Act (even if on leave of absence from the hospital), but excluding people under short term sections 4, 5, 135 and 136
- a conditionally discharged patient
- subject to a Community Treatment Order (CTO)
- subject to guardianship

Other patients, who are informal, are eligible for IMHA services if they are being considered for section 57 or section 58A treatment(s). This includes people under the age of 18 who are being considered for electroconvulsive therapy (ECT).

The Mental Health Act states that you must make eligible people aware of how to access advocacy.

# How to make a referral

Go online to find services near you and make a referral [voiceability.org/referral](https://voiceability.org/referral)

You can also request a referral form by emailing [helpline@voiceability.org](mailto:helpline@voiceability.org)

**If you have questions about eligibility or advocacy types, contact us.**

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Freephone:

**0300 303 1660**

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Email: [helpline@voiceability.org](mailto:helpline@voiceability.org)

Website: [voiceability.org](https://voiceability.org)

## About VoiceAbility

We've been supporting people to have their say in decisions about their health, care and wellbeing for almost 40 years. We're an independent charity and one of the UK's largest providers of advocacy and involvement services.