



# Advocacy step by step



## What you can do if you think your rights are not being respected

You can use the Victorian Charter of Human Rights to make sure that public services such as your local council, the police, Office of Housing and other government departments treat you fairly and respect your rights.

If you are not happy with the way you are being treated by a public service you can speak up and complain. For example if you feel you are not being treated fairly or with respect, if your privacy has not been respected or if you have not given

your full consent to the services you receive. When you speak up, you become an advocate.

Advocacy is about speaking up on human rights issues and taking action to improve things. Other people can advocate for you such as a trusted friend, family member or co-worker. Community workers, lawyers and others can be advocates. And you can be an advocate for others.

Raising a human rights issue using advocacy may result in:

- An explanation for the treatment you have received

- An opportunity to discuss your treatment and its impact face to face
- An apology
- Changes to a decision, policy or action
- Changes so that similar problems do not happen to other people in the future

There are steps you can take as an advocate, when you feel you have been unfairly treated and want to challenge and change the situation. The four steps below include practical suggestions for raising and advocating for a human rights issue using the Charter of Human Rights and where you can get support if you need it.

## Step 4: Take stronger action

You could do one or both of the following:

- Ask for an urgent meeting or phone call
  - Describe in more detail which human rights are affected and the impact on your life
  - Warn that you will take further action: this could include contacting your Member of Parliament, the Victorian Ombudsman or a lawyer in a Community Legal Centre
  - Remind them of the outcome you want
- Get help from a professional advocate
  - Free or low cost advice and support is available. Your discussions with them are confidential. Here are some you can talk to:

**Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission**  
Information on Charter rights  
Phone 1300 292 153 or Interpreters 1300 152 494

**Darebin Community Legal Service**  
Legal advice for people who live or work in Darebin  
Phone 9484 7753

**Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service**  
Legal advice and representation for the Koorie community  
Phone 1800 064 865

**DIVRS (Darebin Information, Volunteer and Resource Service)**  
A community-based service which can provide support and practical assistance for advocacy such as writing letters  
Phone 9480 8200

**Dispute Settlement Centre**  
Free dispute resolution service, can help in neighbourhood and workplace disputes, or conflicts within clubs or associations – Phone 9948 8628 (Collingwood Neighbourhood Justice Centre)

**Disability Rights Victoria**  
Provide individual advocacy, information and support to people with a disability & their carers – Phone 9489 2999

**Health Services Commissioner**  
Deals with problems with a health service or concerns about health privacy – Phone 1800 136 066

**Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre**  
Provides advocacy, support and referral to other services for newly arrived and established migrants and refugees  
Phone 9496 0200 (Preston office)

**Victorian Ombudsman's Office**  
Investigates complaints about State and local government and also public service providers  
Phone 9613 6222 or Interpreters 131 450

**Public Interest Law Clearinghouse**  
Free legal advocacy to challenge unfair policies and laws  
Phone 8636 4400

**Privacy Victoria**  
Makes rules about how personal information is collected and stored by state and local government authorities  
Phone 1300 666 444

**Seniors Rights Victoria**  
Support, advice and assistance to older Victorians including legal advice and advocacy – Phone 1300 368 821

**GLBTIQ (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer) Legal Advice Service**  
Advice and referral on family law matters & discrimination  
Phone 9419 3744 (Fitzroy Legal Service)

**YouthLaw – Young People's Legal Rights Centre**  
Legal advice and advocacy for young people up to the age of 25 years – Phone 9611 2412

**Contact your Darebin Councillors**  
Phone Darebin Council's Customer Service on 8470 8888

**Darebin City Council's Human Rights Officer**  
Provides information on the Charter to the community and is responsible for the Darebin Human Rights Action Plan  
Phone 8470 8446

**Contact your Victorian Member of Parliament**  
Phone Victorian Parliament on 9651 8911

## Step 1: Identify the problem with how you are being treated

It may be helpful to talk about your situation with a trusted friend or family member; they can help you find the right words. Try to describe:

- What is the treatment you have received?
- Who is treating you that way?
- What is wrong with that treatment?
- What is the impact of that treatment on you?
- What needs to change to make the situation better for you?
- Which of the 20 human rights in the Charter of Human Rights are not being respected? (there may be more than one). Go through the Charter rights on the other side of this poster.

Write down your responses so that you can refer to them in Step 2.

## Step 2: Raise the treatment directly and informally

Raise the treatment directly with the people you have been dealing with in the service:

- Have a face to face meeting, or phone call, or send an email
- Tips:
  - Keep calm. Be assertive, not aggressive
  - Describe the treatment you have received and its impact
  - Be clear about which human rights have not been respected. Use the Charter rights here and refer to them
  - Ask when you can expect to hear back from them
  - Consider taking a support person if you have a meeting
  - Take notes about what is said so you can refer back
- Ask for a copy of their complaints process. If they have one, use it to raise your issue but move to Step 3 if needed.

If the response is not satisfactory or taking a long time, move to Step 3.

## Step 3: Raise the treatment formally

Write a formal letter of complaint:

- Describe the treatment and the impact on you
- Emphasise which human rights have not been respected and refer to the Charter of Human Rights again. You can copy the words from this resource (turn over to see the section on the twenty Charter rights).
- Explain what you think they need to do now
- Give a date for when you want to receive their response
- Tell them how you want them to contact you – telephone, email or letter

You can ask for help from a trusted friend, family member or an advocate to write the letter if you need it.

You can hand-deliver the letter or use registered mail if you want to make sure it is received.

If the response is not satisfactory or taking a long time, move to Step 4.