Easy read:
At a glance 68: What Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA) does for people who use services

Main points

• It is your right to have an Independent Mental Health Advocate if you are sectioned under the Mental Health Act.

Being sectioned means you are forced to go into hospital for people with mental health problems or you are made to have help at home when you have come out of hospital. This is called a Community Treatment Order.

• Independent Mental Health Advocates work for you and help you get what you think is best for you. They do not work for the hospital or mental health services. This is why they are called ‘independent’

• Independent Mental Health Advocates can help tell people what you think and what you want. They can also tell you about your rights.

• They help you to choose what you want to do - they do not tell you what they would do.
Independent Mental Health Advocacy is a free service

What some people say about their Independent Mental Health Advocate –

“They help you and can tell you about things and what they will mean for you. If you do not like how things are they will tell you what your rights are. They can give you some support and it gives you a bit of hope. They help you understand how medicines and tablets are meant to help you and can explain why you are being made to stay in hospital.”

“So I thought if I had the advocate with me at the meeting I would get answers to my questions. The advocate asked the questions for me and did a good job. We got answers to some of the questions. It went well and not too long after that I was let out of hospital.”

What this guide is about

This is a short guide about Independent Mental Health Advocacy. It is for people who use mental health services. It may also be useful for other people like carers.
Many people do not know about Independent Mental Health Advocacy in England and this guide is to help more people know about this important service.

Independent Mental Health Advocates are important because they make sure that people know about their rights and help them to get their voice heard.

There are films and other information on SCIE's website - [www.scie.org.uk](http://www.scie.org.uk)

**What is advocacy?**

Advocacy is about making sure that people can tell other people and services about what they need and what they want.

Most people can speak up for themselves, but sometimes we all need some help. An advocate does not tell you what they would do: they help you to decide what you want.

Advocates do not tell you what they would do or what they think is a good or bad thing to do. They will listen to you and help you to get things you want and need.
What is an Independent Mental Health Advocate?

Some people who experience mental health problems are made to go into hospital to get help. This is part of a law called the Mental Health Act.

When this happens people are given a special advocate called an Independent Mental Health Advocate. They are given this advocate to help them because they do not have choice about what is happening to them.

Who can use an Independent Mental Health Advocate?

Independent Mental Health Advocates work with people of all ages in England if they are:

- Made to go into hospital for more than 3 days under the Mental Health Act.
- Put on Community Treatment Orders
- Put on **guardianship** - Guardianship means that someone is given power to tell you what to do. This can be someone from your family, someone from social services or someone else who social services have said can do this.
In a hospital for people with mental health problems by their own choice but might have serious surgery, like surgery on their brain, for a mental health problem.

- In a hospital for people with mental health problems by their own choice but are being considered for Electroconvulsive Therapy and are under 18 years old. Electroconvulsive Therapy is a way of trying to make people with mental health problems feel better using electric shocks.

What does an Independent Mental Health Advocate do?

Independent Mental Health Advocates are advocates who have had training about the Mental Health Act.

They can help you understand:

- Your rights under the Mental Health Act.

- How to say what you think and what you want so your views are heard by the people giving you care and treatment like doctors and nurses.
• Why you have been made to go into hospital.

• Anything that you have to do or are not allowed to do while you are in hospital.

• How to appeal against being forced to go into hospital. Appeal means you think a hospital or service has made a wrong choice about you and the appeal is how you ask them to change this.

Independent Mental Health Advocates help you get any information you need. They can:

• Help you get your medical records.

• Be with you at any time when you talk to doctors on the hospital ward or in meetings.

• Go to meetings for you if you cannot go yourself.

People use Independent Mental Health Advocates in different ways. They can:

• Talk about things with you when you need help to understand something or if you need help making choices.
• Be with you to help you when you are telling people what you want.

• Speak for you if you cannot speak for yourself or do not want to.

• Help you to understand why you are in hospital or being made to take tablets or medicine.

• Help you understand the things that people say when they give you reasons why you can or cannot get out of hospital.

• If you are not able to make choices for yourself, they can help to make sure you do not lose your rights. They can also tell people what they think you would have said about things if you are too ill to say for yourself.

The Independent Mental Health Advocacy service is free.

You should be given information about how to get it when you are sectioned and made to go into hospital, put on a Community Treatment order or put on a guardianship.
Having an Independent Mental Health Advocate does not mean you should not get other types of advocacy or legal advocacy from a solicitor. Independent Mental Health Advocates do not give legal advice, but they can help you to access this type of support if you need it.

You do not have to have an Independent Mental Health Advocate if you do not want one. But you can change your mind if you say you do not want one and then think it would help. You can contact them at any time.

**All advocates are independent**

It is important that advocates are independent. This means they work for you and do not do what other people tell them to do. They will help you say what you want and they will not say what they think about things.

People who know us, like our family and friends and staff, may say that they will advocate for us. But if they do not agree with what we want, that can be a problem for them. They might say they are doing what is best for us when they do not agree with what we want.
Advocates are not part of the mental health service. And they will not give out information about you to services unless you say it is OK.

**How do I contact an Independent Mental Health Advocate?**

It is your right to be put in contact with an Independent Mental Health Advocate if you need their help.

It is important that the hospital or mental health staff tell you about your legal right to see an Independent Mental Health Advocate. Sometimes this happens when you are upset or not sure what is happening and you might forget about it.

But you can ask for an advocate at any time when you are in hospital because you are told you have to be there, or if you are being made to have treatment at home.
People find out about advocacy services in different ways:

- From other people who have used an Independent Mental Health Advocate.

- From a poster or leaflet on a notice board.

- An Independent Mental Health Advocate might visit the ward to meet people and tell them what they do.

- Staff from any mental health services can give you the contact details.

You can ask the staff to ask an Independent Mental Health Advocate to contact you or you can contact them yourself.
Examples

Jane (not her real name)

Jane was unhappy about being made to go back into hospital as she did not think she was ill and she did not think the hospital helped her when she was there before.

Her mum thought she should be there because she was not safe at home. The hospital was on the other side of town and it took her mum a long time to visit her. This meant she found it hard to go to meetings about Jane.

Her mum found out about the Independent Mental Health Advocacy service and asked them to visit Jane.

Jane liked talking with the Independent Mental Health Advocate. She thought they listened to her about the things that worried her.

The Independent Mental Health Advocate went with her to the next meeting with her doctor. She felt better about saying what she wanted and how she felt about being in hospital.
After the meeting, the Independent Mental Health Advocate helped her to remember what had been talked about at the meeting and asked her what she wanted to do next.

Chris (not his real name)

When Chris went into hospital he was very angry and did not want to talk to an Independent Mental Health Advocate. He thought they were the same as all the other staff and just worked for the hospital.

When he heard there was going to be an important meeting he got scared and worried about what was being written in his medical notes.

He read that the Independent Mental Health Advocate could look at his medical notes, and chose to speak to them.

The Independent Mental Health Advocate helped him to read his medical notes and wrote down what he wanted to say in the meeting. They found out who would be at the meeting and what would happen there. The main reason for the meeting was for the staff to tell Chris why he needed to be in the hospital and for Chris to say what he thought about this.

At the meeting the Independent Mental Health Advocate helped Chris to listen to what was said and to tell people what he wanted.
After the meeting Chris was still unhappy about being kept in hospital but felt that the staff now knew what he thought and they were able to plan together for the future.

**Tomasz (not his real name)**

Tomasz never liked his pills and tablets and he stopped taking them. He was made to stay in hospital and forced to take the pills and tablets.

This made him angry. He felt nobody listened to anything he said because he was Polish.

He told the Independent Mental Health Advocate about this and they contacted someone who could speak English and Polish. They told him his rights in his own language.

They also helped him to tell the doctors that he did not like his tablets because they made him feel ill. Because of this the doctors were able to give him different pills and tablets.