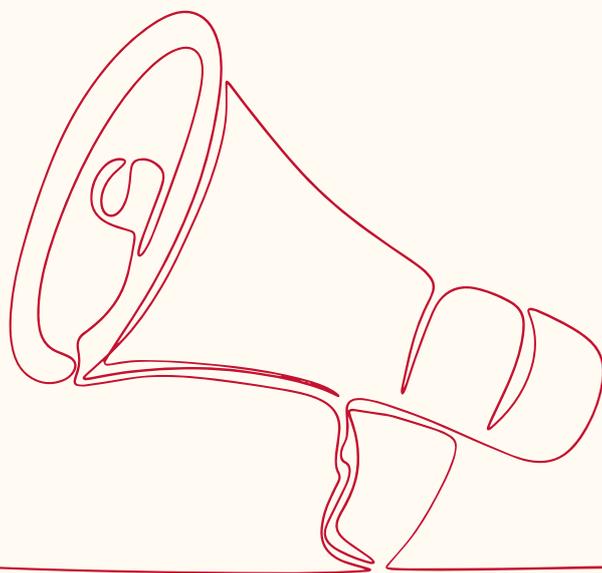
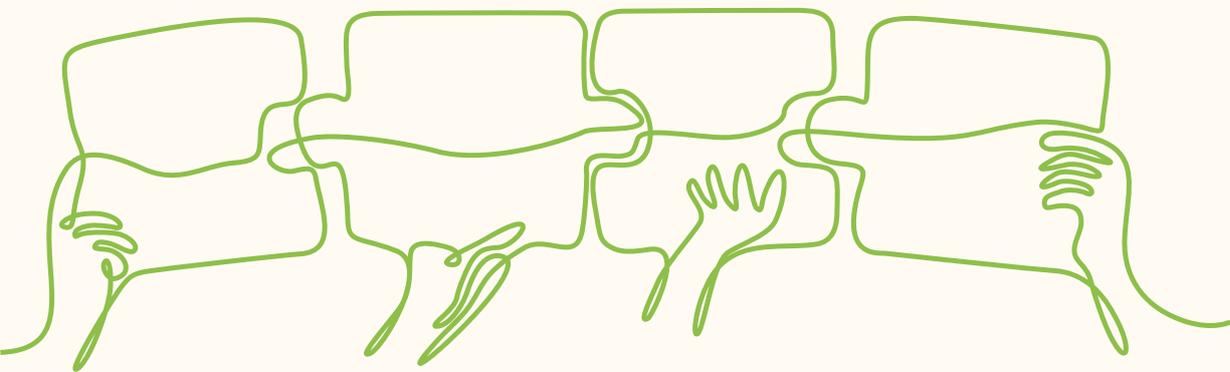


Voice. Rights. Independence.



Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance
2026 Manifesto







Independent advocacy manifesto

Summary of priorities and asks

1

Priority One: Addressing the Need

including implementing Scottish Mental Health Law Review Recommendations for independent advocacy

2

Priority Two: Sustainable, High-Quality Provision

including addressing the consistency and quality of strategic advocacy planning

3

Priority Three: Growing Preventative Models of Independent Advocacy

including championing collective and citizen models

Immediate Priorities

- **Parliamentary inquiry:** Investigate the gap between legislative requirements and actual provision of independent advocacy, examining access barriers, inconsistent procurement, and independence concerns
- **Updated guidance:** Refresh the 2013 Independent Advocacy Guide for Commissioners by December 2026, establishing three-year review cycles
- **Sustainable funding:** Implement minimum three-year funding cycles for all government-funded independent advocacy
- **Legal duty enforcement:** Government to regularly remind Health and Social Care Partnerships of their statutory obligations to ensure independent advocacy availability
- **Geographic coverage:** Address gaps in provision, particularly in prisons and rural areas

Long-term Investment Requirements

- Support development of monitoring and evaluation systems that maintain independence whilst demonstrating quality
- Fund learning for independent advocacy focusing on anti-racism and human rights
- Support infrastructure for publication of national data on independent advocacy provision and unmet need
- Protect collective and citizen advocacy through dedicated funding streams recognising these as preventative investments



Independent advocacy manifesto

Summary of priorities and asks

All Scottish legislation must adopt a consistent, sector-agreed definition of independence.

Proposed Bill	Asks
Learning Disability, Autism and Neurodivergence (LDAN) Bill	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish independent advocacy as a legal right• Implement Rome Review recommendations including opt-out referral pathways• Fund provision in justice settings• Create specific collective advocacy rights
Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guarantee care-experienced children access to independent advocacy throughout their journey• Ensure comprehensive, non-fragmented provision• Resource adequately from implementation date
Scottish Human Rights Bill	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduce within first year of parliamentary term• Embed independent advocacy as mechanism for rights realisation• Create robust enforcement mechanisms• Enable independent advocacy organisations to support rights claiming
Mental Health and Capacity Reform (Adults with Incapacity, Adult Support and Protection, Mental Health legislation)	Implement Scottish Mental Health Law Review recommendations on independent advocacy, this should include; <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Co-design implementation with SIAA and partners• Establish opt-out referral pathways at key decision points• Ensure infrastructure funding precedes expanded rights by 18 months• Create collective advocacy as a defined legal right with complaint and legal challenge mechanisms
UNCRC Alignment Across All Bills	Ensure that every provision of every Bill listed above is drafted so that it falls within the scope of the UNCRC Act 2024. Legislative drafting must avoid creating gaps in enforceability, including where Bills amend pre-1999 legislation in devolved areas.



Introduction

What Independent Advocacy Makes Possible

We all want a Scotland where everyone can live the life they want to live, in the place they call home, with the people and things they love, doing what matters to them. Where barriers and power imbalances do not prevent people from participating in decisions that affect their lives. Where systems work with people, not against them.

Independent advocacy makes this vision possible. It ensures people's voices shape the services, policies, and decisions that affect their lives. It prevents crises, upholds rights, and enables effective participation.

Why This Matters Now

Across Scotland, independent advocacy provision is fragile. Recent funding cuts, including significant reductions in Edinburgh and other areas, threaten infrastructure built over decades. This comes at precisely the wrong time as research has shown that:

- [People reporting mental health conditions increased from 4.4% in 2011 to 11.3% in 2022](#) (Scotland's Census)
- [Guardianships have doubled in the past decade](#) (Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland)
- [Mental health detentions are at record highs](#), with fewest safeguards in a decade (Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland)
- In 2023, [71% of independent advocacy organisations reported unmet need](#) for independent advocacy in their local area. Many now operate waiting lists for the first time in their histories. Referrals are increasingly complex, requiring more time per person, whilst funding remains static or decreases.

These trends tell us something important: more people across Scotland need support to have their voice heard and maintain control over their lives. Independent advocacy enables people to navigate, speak up and be heard in all the moments that matter, from life-changing statutory decisions about guardianship or mental health treatment, to everyday interactions with their GP or housing officer. When people have this support early, they stay connected to what matters to them and avoid reaching crisis point altogether. Public sector time is also saved as independent advocacy means people feel able to attend meeting they would have otherwise missed.

Independent advocacy works – for systems and for people. Research from Social Finance has identified that for every £1 invested, we see approximately £7 in NHS savings and £5 in local authority savings. But these figures only tell part of the story. When people have independent advocacy support, they maintain greater control over their lives, stay better connected to their communities, and continue making the valued contributions that enrich Scotland.

We have a choice to make. We can invest now in the systems that enable people to live good lives with meaning, purpose and connection, or we can accept the far higher costs, both human and financial, of waiting until crisis point. Scotland has the knowledge, the evidence, and the resources to build a future where everyone's voice is heard. The question is whether we'll use them.

"I've been involved in collective advocacy groups since 2011 and they've saved my life. They're the reason I'm able to attend events [...] and have the confidence to speak up for myself and others like me ."

— Collective advocacy group member

Independent advocacy = Right to be heard



Principle 1: Independent advocacy is loyal to the people it supports and stands by their views and wishes.

Principle 2: Independent advocacy ensures people's voices are listened to and their views taken into account.

Principle 3: Independent advocacy stands up to injustice, discrimination and disempowerment.

About SIAA and Independent Advocacy



The Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance (SIAA) is the national intermediary organisation for independent advocacy in Scotland. For over two decades, we have promoted, supported, defended, and advocated for independent advocacy.

SIAA has 32 member organisations that offer collective and individual independent advocacy in various settings, including communities, hospitals, and prisons. The majority of this is provided in-person to ensure it is accessible and person-centred. Our members work within the [Independent Advocacy Principles, Standards and Code of Best Practice](#), which emphasise the PANEL principles of Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination, Empowerment, and Legality.

What Is Independent Advocacy?

Independent advocacy is about speaking up for and standing alongside individuals or groups, without being influenced by others' views. It addresses barriers and power imbalances, ensuring people's human rights are recognised, respected, and secured.

Independence is what makes independent advocacy work. Independent advocacy organisations must be structurally, financially, and psychologically independent from service providers and statutory organisations. This freedom from conflicts of interest enables advocates to support people's views and wishes, even when these conflict with professional opinions or perceived risk.

Independence means that independent advocacy:

- Does not make decisions for people or control resources
- Does not work in "best interests" - it works with the person's own views and wishes
- Takes a human rights-based approach
- Has no undue influence over a person
- Actively minimises conflicts of interest

This **independence** enables:

- **Trust:** People can speak freely without fear their independent advocate has divided loyalties
- **Quality:** The independent advocate's primary loyalty and accountability is to the advocacy partner or group
- **Addressing imbalances of power:** Independence challenges organisations to truly listen to people's voices are about providing, promoting, supporting and defending independent advocacy.

Sometimes advocacy from a professional, family member, or service provider fits well for someone. But when someone's views conflict with services, when power imbalances are significant, or when decisions are contested, independent advocacy is vital to ensuring their voice can be heard.

Advocacy Partner: a person who accesses independent advocacy. The term emphasises the independent advocate and the person they are supporting are working as equal partners.

Independent advocacy organisation only provides independent advocacy and all the activities it undertakes are about providing, promoting, supporting and defending independent advocacy.

Models of Independent Advocacy

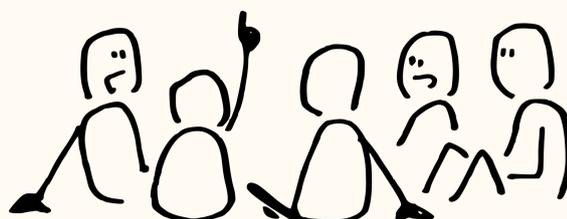
Individual advocacy helps people navigate services, understand their rights, participate in decisions, and develop skills to advocate for themselves. It prevents situations from escalating and enables people to get the right support at the right times.

Citizen advocacy is a type of individual advocacy which involves volunteers from the local community developing long-term, one-to-one relationships with people who need support. "For many people, their citizen advocate is the only person not paid to be in their life."

Collective advocacy enables groups to explore shared issues, find common ground, and influence the decisions that affect their lives. As one collective advocacy group member stated: "We use our lived experiences to help improve future services and provisions by looking at what doesn't work and voicing realistic suggestions for improvements."

"Independent advocacy has made a big difference to me, it's helped me to express my feelings and get my point across about things I probably would never have opened up about."

- Advocacy Partner



A Better Path Forward

Independent advocacy provision in Scotland is most commonly associated with the legal right of access in the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003. Unfortunately, the vision for independent advocacy for people covered by the 2003 Act has not been realised in the past 20 years. This failure has been extensively recognised in the 2022 Scottish Mental Health Law Review (SMHLR), which made 21 detailed recommendations on independent advocacy. The recommendations emphasised individual independent advocacy's role in supported decision-making and expanding and strengthening collective advocacy. The Scottish Government accepted all these recommendations in 2023. Later in the manifesto, we will cover how these recommendations should form a central part of the next Scottish Government's response to the state of independent advocacy in Scotland. It is vital to recognise that independent advocacy extends far beyond mental health law. Independent advocacy is now mentioned in ten Scottish laws including:

- Mental Health (Care & Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003
- Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007
- Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009
- Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011
- Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013
- Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018
- Children (Scotland) Act 2020
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024
- Care Reform (Scotland) Act 2025



In practice this means that independent advocates are often alongside people at mental health tribunals, guardianship processes, and adult support and protection case conferences, supporting their views to be heard about where they want to live, the medication they need, or the family members they want to see regularly. But they also support children's voice to be heard through hearings, and when navigating additional support requirements in schools, as well as supporting people to have their views heard when accessing social care, and navigating the justice system.

SIAA anticipate rights to independent advocacy to continue to expand in Scotland. For example, the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill includes rights to independent advocacy in line with The Promise commitment that everyone with care experience should have access to independent advocacy at all stages.

Multiple reviews over the past decade – on learning disability, autism, adult social care, mental illness and capacity – reached the same conclusion: **we need more independent advocacy, not less.**

The 2026 election presents an opportunity to build provision that matches Scotland's ambitions as a human rights leader. SIAA have identified two parallel opportunities the next Scottish Government should commit to taking forward.

First, cross-cutting action: The next Scottish Government must strengthen independent advocacy provision across ALL these policy areas through improved funding, infrastructure, and legislative alignment. These needs are universal.

Second, mental health reform as a test case: The accepted Scottish Mental Health Law Review recommendations provide a detailed blueprint for comprehensive independent advocacy provision in one major policy area. Implementing these 21 recommendations properly - with adequate funding, a clear definition of independent advocacy agreed by the sector and infrastructure preceding expanded rights - will demonstrate what good provision looks like and should inform approaches in other policy areas.

Through universal and specific asks, this manifesto sets out how the next Scottish Government can ensure that legal rights become lived reality, that proven investments are protected and expanded, and that people's voices genuinely shape Scotland's future.



“Collective Advocacy speaks truth to power. It's important for marginalised people to have their voices heard, especially in these times of crisis where it often seems only the richest and most powerful matter.”

— Collective advocacy group member



Priority One: Addressing the Need

including implementing Scottish Mental Health Law Review Recommendations for independent advocacy

Independent advocacy is a legal right in Scotland. The Mental Health (Care & Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 guarantees this right to anyone with a 'mental disorder' (the Act's terminology) - including people with mental illness, learning disabilities, acquired brain injury, dementia, and autistic people. This right applies whether someone is in hospital or the community, under compulsory measures or not, and regardless of communication difficulties.

Yet the Scottish Mental Health Law Review found that in practice, only 5% of people with this legal right can access it.

The Gaps in Provision

A narrow interpretation of the 2003 Act's 'Duty to ensure availability of independent advocacy' has created significant gaps:

What are the gaps?

- Statutory processes only: Due to underfunding from commissioners with the legal duty to 'ensure availability', independent advocacy organisations prioritise statutory processes like mental health tribunals where liberty is at risk. While understandable, this means provision beyond these crisis points is minimal, despite the law speaking to a much broader right.
- Children and young people: Some Health and Social Care Partnerships only fund provision from age 16 or 18, leaving younger children without access despite their clear entitlements under the 2003 Act.
- Justice settings: [SIAA research](#) found that funding structures, not need, determine provision. Organisations with dedicated contracts report 7-20% of referrals from justice settings; those without report 0-2%. Currently, 6 of Scotland's 17 prisons have no independent advocacy provision. Where independent advocacy is consistently available and properly explained in one forensic setting, uptake reaches close to 100%. SIAA member organisations also report increasing asks for independent advocacy support through court processes. This is often impossible to provide with the limited capacity the sector faces, leaving people without a voice or understanding of the system at crucial decision making points.

1 Priority One: Addressing the Need

What are the gaps?

- Rural areas: Many rural areas lack adequate local provision. While local organisations with in-depth community knowledge exist in many parts of Scotland, they are frequently underfunded for travel costs and capacity.
- Accessible independent advocacy: There are no clear routes for accessing translation services or making translation services available to advocacy partners, including British Sign Language interpretation. Our research shows that independent advocacy organisations are not specifically funded for translation services. Approaches vary across Scotland, and in some areas these resources are limited or unavailable.

Overall this all amounts to a narrow interpretation of the 2003 Act's 'Duty to ensure availability of independent advocacy'. Health and Social Care Partnerships must fund independent advocacy beyond statutory processes like tribunals, reflecting the full breadth of the legal right. Strategic advocacy plans should demonstrate how availability will be ensured for all entitled groups, including children and young people.

There are already clear solutions that would address some of these gaps. SIAA urge the next Scottish Government to work with SIAA and our members to implement the Scottish Mental Health Law Review's **21 recommendations on independent advocacy in relation to Scottish Mental Health and Capacity Laws**. The Scottish Government accepted all these recommendations in 2023; SIAA calls on the next Scottish Government to renew and redouble efforts to implement the recommendations it accepted three years ago. These 21 independent advocacy recommendations form a comprehensive framework for ensuring that independent advocacy provision matches Scotland's human rights ambitions. Some need to wait for legislative reform, but crucially some do not. Pilot work needs to be undertaken to understand best practice before law reform happens.

"Being involved brings meaning to our struggle ...My self-esteem, confidence and knowledge of mental health has been boosted...knowing we are contributing to positive change."

— Collective advocacy group member

1 Priority One: Addressing the Need

Scottish Mental Health Law Review (SMHLR) 21 Recommendations on independent advocacy

On Individual Advocacy (Recommendations 4.6-4.11):

4.6: Align legislation and policy to ensure consistency on definition, access rights, and commissioning/funding. Consider opt-out provision for adults, with equivalent process for children and young people

4.7: Ensure independent individual and collective advocacy is sustainably funded, including culturally appropriate provision

4.8: Consider a national independent advocacy provision

4.9: Develop a national register of independent advocates (SIAA and advocacy groups to lead)

4.10: Develop a national training programme for independent advocates that ensures access for all who wish to work in the field (SIAA and advocacy groups to lead)

4.11: Ensure an existing or new organisation has responsibility for monitoring and continuing development of independent advocacy

On Children and Young People (Recommendations 12.16-12.19):

12.16: Strengthen duties to ensure any child with a mental or intellectual disability is made aware of their right to independent advocacy and can obtain it when needed

12.17: Streamline various advocacy duties (mental health, Children's Hearings, additional support for learning) to ensure comprehensive, holistic, child-centred provision integrated with broader support for decision-making

12.18: New duty on Scottish Ministers to support collective advocacy for children with mental or intellectual disability

12.19: The scrutiny network should oversee outcomes for children across health, care and education settings, including collective advocacy organisations representing children and young people

1 Priority One: Addressing the Need

Scottish Mental Health Law Review (SMHLR) 21 Recommendations on independent advocacy

On Collective Advocacy and Accountability (Recommendations 11.22-11.28):

11.22: People with mental or intellectual disability should have a right to collective advocacy

11.23: Legal duty on Scottish Government to secure and support effective collective advocacy organisations at local and national levels

11.24: SIAA and collective advocacy organisations to lead development of:
Systems for supporting, monitoring and evaluating collective advocacy that respect independence

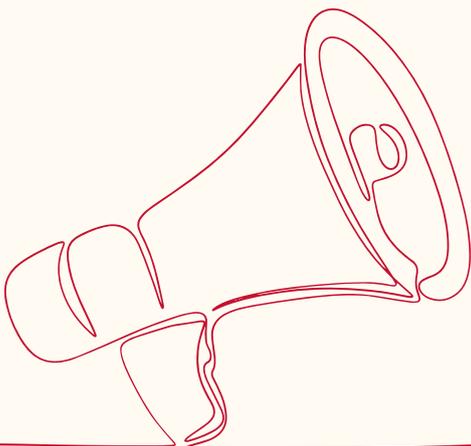
Opt-in learning programmes for advocacy workers and peer leaders, including training on anti-racism, intersectionality and human rights

11.25: Individual and collective advocacy groups should have explicit right to raise court actions for human rights breaches

11.26: This right must be supported by access to legal advice, guidance and support

11.27: Groups should be able to refer systemic human rights concerns to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, with the Ombudsman's role extended to investigate collective complaints

11.28: The Mental Welfare Commission and advocacy groups should develop a participatory referral process to escalate unresolved issues to the MWC for investigation and, if appropriate, legal action



1 Priority One: Addressing the Need

What Implementation Requires:

SIAA has already made significant strides towards the realisation of several recommendations within the SMHLR, including building a learning platform with specialised courses for independent advocates, publishing the [Outcomes Framework](#) and [‘Defining ‘Quality’](#) reports for independent advocacy and started conversations with our member organisations about what implementation of the recommendations would look like for them.

Central to our work on quality is independence. As our 'Defining Quality' report stated: "Independence is not just a guiding principle but a prerequisite for quality of practice." SIAA members reached consensus on the definition of independent advocacy nearly a decade ago and have worked to this definition, described in this manifesto and in the [Independent Advocacy Principles Standards and Code of Best Practice](#), since 2019.

Building on this foundation, SIAA published the 2024 paper [Legal Definition and Components of Independent Advocacy](#), which outlines how structural, financial, and psychological independence should be defined in primary and secondary legislation. Implementation of SMHLR recommendation 4.6 must build from this sector-agreed definition and use it to align independent advocacy across all Scottish legislation.

Beyond SIAA’s current work, implementing the SMHLR recommendations requires political leadership from all parties, adequate resourcing (recognising that £12 is saved for every £1 spent), long-term commitment to building capacity, and accountability mechanisms when rights cannot be accessed. SIAA champions a partnership approach to creating the necessary change, where changed independent advocacy systems and frameworks are led by independent advocacy organisations, advocacy partners, collective advocacy groups and SIAA. Finally, we need local and national government to enable cross-policy coordination as independent advocacy expands across different policy areas so that place-based and community models are persevered to meet the needs of advocacy partners.

Work therefore on our recommendations to develop and support collective advocacy should begin now. It does not need to await legislative change. Indeed, work needs to begin now if the wider legislative reforms we are proposing are to be effective.

— Scottish Mental Health Law Review



Priority Two: Sustainable, High-Quality Provision including addressing the consistency and quality of strategic advocacy planning

Independent advocacy can only be effective if it is truly independent, adequately resourced, and sustainably funded. Currently, provision across Scotland is fragile, inconsistent, and threatened by short-term budget pressures.

As independent advocacy expands across different policy areas – from mental health to children's hearings, from social care to social security – the sector must maintain both place-based provision (serving everyone in a locality) and community-of-interest provision (serving specific populations). These approaches must complement each other, ensuring no one falls through gaps as independent advocacy develops.

What Sustainable Provision Looks Like

To take the gap of provision in justice settings as an example. One independent advocacy organisation has been commissioned by an NHS Health Board to provide independent advocacy in a prison for the last 12 years. This consistent funding enables between 500 to 600 people to access support each year, this represents 20% of the organisation's work. This commissioning approach demonstrates what becomes possible with strategic, long-term commitment in a prison setting.

By contrast, when the Scottish Government changed throughcare funding arrangements in 2024, requiring partnership applications that independent advocacy organisations could not meet (because they must remain independent from service providers), provision supporting people being liberated from prison closed, despite significant need.

Currently, provision depends not on need but on whether commissioning processes allow truly independent organisations to access funding.

What Quality Provision Looks Like

SIAA's 2025 'Defining Quality' report established five pillars of quality independent advocacy:

- Advocacy Partners' experience
- Evidence-based improvement
- On-going learning and development
- Alignment in shared standards
- Effective regulation

2

Priority Two: Sustainable, High-Quality Provision

These pillars reveal what quality means: practice continuously developed based on evidence, which places advocacy partners' experience at its core, remains consistent throughout Scotland, and is enabled by shared standards and effective regulation.

Quality depends on independence. Independent advocacy can only be high quality if organisations remain:

- **Structural independence:** Independent advocacy organisations must not deliver services to the people they support
- **Financial independence:** Funding arrangements must not create conflicts of interest
- **Psychological independence:** Advocates must be free to support people's views and wishes

SIAA members increasingly report requests from commissioners for detailed operational data that does not measure independent advocacy quality or outcomes but can compromise psychological independence. Our position paper "[Sensible Sharing](#)" (2025) makes clear that when data sharing requests jeopardise independence, they undermine the very purpose of commissioning independent advocacy.

The [2013 Independent Advocacy Guide for Commissioners](#) provides clear guidance that holds true today: commissioners should limit information collection "to the useful minimum" and ensure information passed to them "should not contain any identifying detail." It is important to note that many systems and digital approaches have changed significantly since 2013 so SIAA recommends the Scottish Government update the 2013 "Guide for Commissioners" so it is relevant for the present infrastructure.

The Scottish Government must reinforce shared standards through updated guidance and legislation with aligned definitions of independence. This means creating and enforcing funding rules that enable local commissioners to resource genuinely independent organisations effectively, not inadvertently exclude them through inappropriate partnership requirements or data demands.

Strategic Advocacy Planning

Strategic advocacy planning enables both sustainable and quality provision. [Research shows](#) £1 spent on independent advocacy saves approximately £7 to the NHS and £5 to local authorities through crisis prevention, more effective service use, reduced complaints and litigation, and better outcomes when services are shaped by lived experience.

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Priority Two: Sustainable, High-Quality Provision

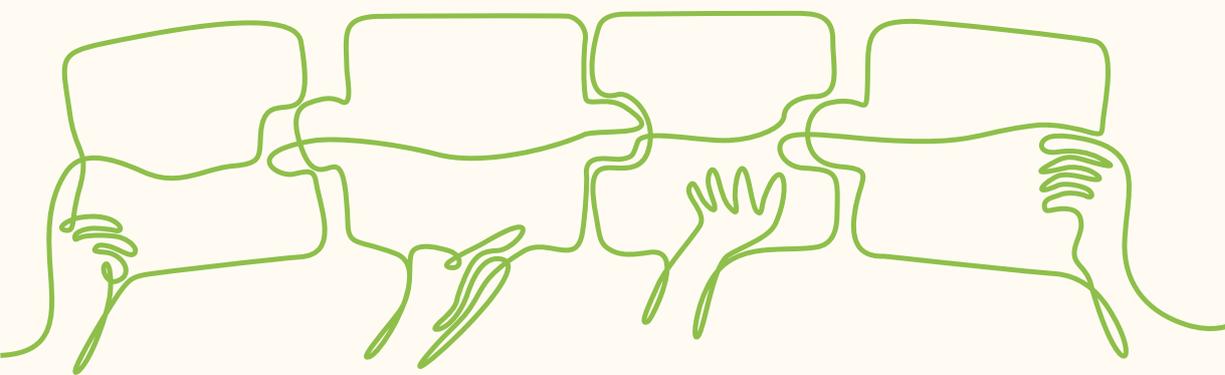
The Mental Health Act 2015 created duties for local authorities and health boards to notify the Mental Welfare Commission how they ensure access to advocacy services and plan to do so in future. Yet the [Commission's 2026 report](#) found that of 32 local authority areas, only 20 had strategic plans in place, some areas without plans said they had no plans to develop one.

Existing Scottish Government guidance emphasises prevention as central to strategic planning, alongside active participation of individuals and communities. The [Population Health Framework](#) highlights the need for a human rights-based and preventative commissioning approach. Healthcare Improvement Scotland identifies that strategic planning should maximize use of existing independent advocacy groups and prioritise prevention.

Independent advocacy enables this vision: it fosters human rights culture, promotes participation, and supports prevention by helping services engage with people and communities.

SIAA has co-produced the [Outcomes Framework: Toolkit for Demonstrating Impact of Independent Advocacy](#) to support organisations, funders, and commissioners to monitor independent advocacy effectively. The toolkit provides practical recommendations on what can be measured and what that data reveals about quality and impact, without compromising independence.

Strategic advocacy planning must improve. SIAA is committed to working with stakeholders to strengthen plans and support their development across Scotland.



3

Priority Three: Growing Preventative Models of Independent Advocacy

including championing collective and citizen models

Collective and citizen advocacy represent the most preventative forms of independent advocacy. They build community, address systemic issues, prevent isolation, and enable people to participate in shaping policies and services. Yet they are the most vulnerable to cuts and the least understood by commissioners.

As independent advocacy provision expands across different policy areas, collective and citizen advocacy become even more crucial. They provide the community infrastructure and peer support networks that complement individual advocacy, whilst addressing systemic issues that cross policy boundaries.

The Power of Collective Advocacy

Collective advocacy creates spaces for people to explore shared issues, support each other, and find a stronger voice to influence decisions affecting their lives. Recent testimonials reveal what this means in practice:

"Collective advocacy provides the protective health factors of activities that are purposeful and meaningful, scheduled all year round to look forward to. For me, [OOSOOM \[Out of Sight, Out of Mind exhibition\]](#) are friends, family and colleagues combined."

"The [EOT \[Experiences of Trauma\]](#) group is a trauma informed pathway... We are using our adversities to create hope and advance how we compassionately support others. This space helps us to nurture safely and ultimately grow as people."

Quotes from members of [CAPS Independent Advocacy's Collective Advocacy](#) groups.

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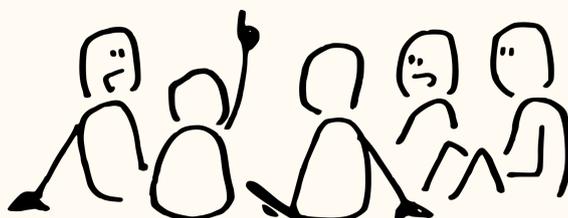
Priority Three: Preventative Models

Collective advocacy groups:

- Influence policy and practice through co-production and education
- Challenge systemic discrimination by raising collective concerns
- Prevent crises by building peer support networks and developing skills
- Hold services accountable by documenting lived experience
- Create community where people can be their authentic selves

Examples of the impact of collective advocacy

- The [Lothian Voices group](#) met with Minister Paul McClelland in 2024 regarding homelessness and housing, ensuring lived experience voices reached parliamentary level
- The [Much More Than A Label group](#) delivers workshops on personality disorder to nurses and therapists – often the only training professionals receive on this diagnosis
- [Spirit Advocacy](#) supported the review of the mental health assessment template and participate in the induction of new mental health nursing staff
- [Independent Advocacy Perth and Kinross's New Scots group](#) has shed light on issues connected to life in temporary hotel accommodation, contributed to Perth's City of Sanctuary strategy.
- The [Oor Mad History](#) project has documented the history of mental health activism, informing current policy and practice
- The [Out of Sight, Out of Mind exhibition](#) provides a platform for hundreds to express experiences through art
- VOX Scotland and SIAA organised an event with Minister for Social Care and Mental Wellbeing, Tom Arthur MSP, with the shared purpose of strengthening collective advocacy.



Citizen Advocacy: Building Lasting Connections

Citizen advocacy involves unpaid citizens developing long-term, one-to-one relationships with people who need support. The relationship is based on trust and is supported, but not influenced, by the independent advocacy organisation.

For many people, their citizen advocate is the only person not paid to be in their life. Citizen advocacy has a preventative role as people become more connected to their local community through these trusting relationships.

SIAA is encouraged by the Scottish Government approach to the pilot project "[Independent Advocacy Social Care Fund](#)" that focusses on collective, citizen and peer independent advocacy projects. We are keen to see models of independent advocacy supported in this way in the next parliamentary term and beyond.

Citizen advocacy story from [Dunfermline Advocacy](#)

John is a young man who is starting out in life with a job, car and flat and a good social life. Paul leads a free lifestyle but is also vulnerable. He has been bullied by the local youngsters and has been in trouble with the police before. He buckles to peer pressure as he wants to fit in with the "normal" crowd and would therefore do anything to impress people and feel part of the crowd. Paul has a learning disability. He and John get on well together when they meet. John provides Paul with a positive role model which is that of an ordinary guy working hard and trying to get on in life, while Paul has opened up a whole new world for John. John has found himself doing things that he never expected he would be doing e.g. liaising with Paul's consultant and college tutors and researching other activities for Paul to be engaging in.

Why These Models Matter for Scotland's Future

Collective and citizen advocacy cannot be "mandated" into existence – they must emerge organically from communities' needs, wants, and views. Having a variety of models available is one of the practical ways we can support centring advocacy partners. Quality independent advocacy places Advocacy Partners' experience at its core and is one of five pillars of underpinning quality independent advocacy provision. To ensure different models of independent advocacy are protected and strengthened SIAA call for sustained support and resources.



Independent Advocacy Manifesto Asks

Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance and our member organisations urge the MSPs elected at the 2026 Scottish elections and the next Scottish Government commit to the below asks to strengthen independent advocacy and ensure people in Scotland can have their voices heard.

Before Mental Health and Capacity Law Reform

- **Support a parliamentary committee inquiry into independent advocacy provision across Scotland**, examining: the gap between legislative intent and lived reality; barriers to access; inconsistent procurement approaches within Scottish Government and across Health and Social Care Partnerships; and instances where procured advocacy lacks independence. The inquiry should make recommendations for sustainable funding and expansion of provision across all proposed policy areas.
- **Update the 2013 Independent Advocacy Guide for Commissioners** by December 2026: ensuring Health and Social Care Partnerships have current guidance on legal duties, commissioning best practice, and sustainable funding models. Establish a review cycle for this guidance every three years.
- **Establish minimum three-year funding cycles**: Establish minimum three-year funding cycles for all Scottish Government-funded independent advocacy, with clear renewal processes based on quality and need. Encourage Health and Social Care Partnerships to do the same.
- Using their influence over health budget spend the new Scottish Government must show leadership by **regularly reminding Health and Social Care Partnerships (HSCPs) of their legal duty** under the 2003 Act to ensure availability of independent advocacy and commit to sustainably funding models like collective advocacy that hold public bodies to account.
- The Scottish Government must **support HSCPs to address geographic and setting-specific gaps** by ensuring provision in all prisons and rural areas where local commissioning has failed to meet the need.



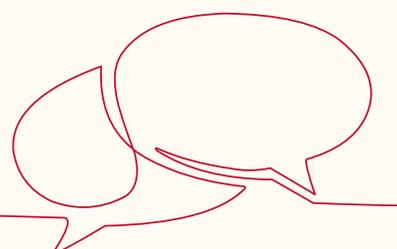
Independent Advocacy Manifesto Asks

Long term investment in independent advocacy

- **Support SIAA and collective advocacy organisations to develop systems for monitoring and evaluation** that respect independence whilst demonstrating quality, including funding for an opt-in learning programme for advocacy workers and peer leaders with training on anti-racism and human rights
- **The Scottish Government must work collaboratively with the independent advocacy sector to monitor and publish national data** on independent advocacy provision and unmet need, including gaps by area, population group, and setting, building on the Mental Welfare Commission's monitoring role and SIAA's Advocacy Map work.
- **Protect and expand collective and citizen advocacy provision through dedicated Scottish Government funding streams** that recognise these as preventative investments distinct from individual advocacy, with particular protection for grassroots, place-based provision.

Delivering on Commitments: Independent Advocacy in Legislation

The Scottish Government has committed to multiple Bills affecting independent advocacy rights and provision. Citizens, the Scottish Government, public sector partners, and third sector organisations have invested years of work developing these proposals. The next Parliament must deliver on these commitments properly - with adequate funding, protected independence for advocacy, and rights that work in practice. The definition of independence must be aligned across all Scottish legislation that references independent advocacy: implementing the consistent definition recommended in both the 'Defining Quality' report and Scottish Mental Health Law Review. The definition should be adopted from the sector agreed definition from the Independent Advocacy Principles and implemented through embedding financial and structural independence in primary legislation and psychological independence in guidance.





Independent Advocacy Manifesto Asks

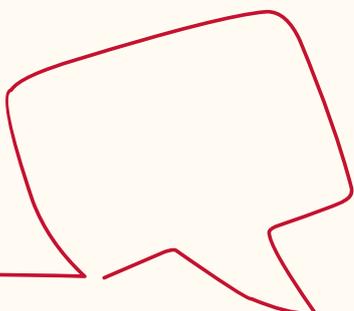
These below pieces of legislation present the opportunity to get this right:

Proposed Bill	Asks
Learning Disability, Autism and Neurodivergence (LDAN) Bill	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Legislate for independent advocacy as a right, with clear sector agreed definition.• Implement all Rome Review recommendations including opt-out referral pathways.• Legislate for and fund provision for independent advocacy in justice settings including through court processes. Ensure this is sustainably funded and learning for the sector is supported.• Establish rights to both specialist community-of-interest provision for example for people with learning disabilities, and place-based provision.• Create specific collective advocacy rights for people covered by the LDAN Bill.• Fund sustainably from day one - infrastructure must precede rights.
Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guarantee care-experienced children can access independent advocacy at every stage of their journey, delivering on The Promise• Ensure provision is comprehensive and holistic, not fragmented across policy areas• Resource adequately to meet expanded rights from implementation date
Scottish Human Rights Bill	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Commit to introducing a Scottish Human Rights Bill in the first year of the parliamentary term and to taking forward concrete action to address the devolution scope gap, ensuring that human rights protections across devolved areas can be strengthened and enforced in practice.• Embed independent advocacy as a mechanism for making rights real and accessible, especially within Access to Justice and rights remedy areas.• Create robust enforcement mechanisms that hold duty bearers accountable.• Ensure independent advocacy organisations can support people to claim their rights.



Independent Advocacy Manifesto Asks

Proposed Bill	Asks
Mental Health and Capacity Reform (Adults with Incapacity, Adult Support and Protection, Mental Health legislation)	<p>Implement Scottish Mental Health Law Review recommendations on independent advocacy, this should include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Co-design implementation with SIAA, member organisations, advocacy partners and collective advocacy groups• Use sector definition of independence in law and guidance• Consult the sector about procurement and funding arrangements.• Establish opt-out referral pathways at all key decision points (detentions, guardianship, compulsory treatment)• Ensure infrastructure funding precedes expanded rights by at least 18 months.• Make independent advocacy central to all three strands of reform, not an afterthought.• Establish collective advocacy as a clear and defined legal right with a duty on Scottish Government to secure and support effective collective advocacy organisations at local and national levels .• Establish the right for collective advocacy groups to bring collective complaints and legal challenges for human rights breaches.
UNCRC Alignment Across All Bills	<p>Scottish Government and Parliament must ensure that every provision of every Bill listed above is drafted so that it falls within the scope of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024. Legislative drafting must avoid creating gaps in enforceability, including where Bills amend pre-1999 legislation in devolved areas.</p>





Independent Advocacy Manifesto Asks

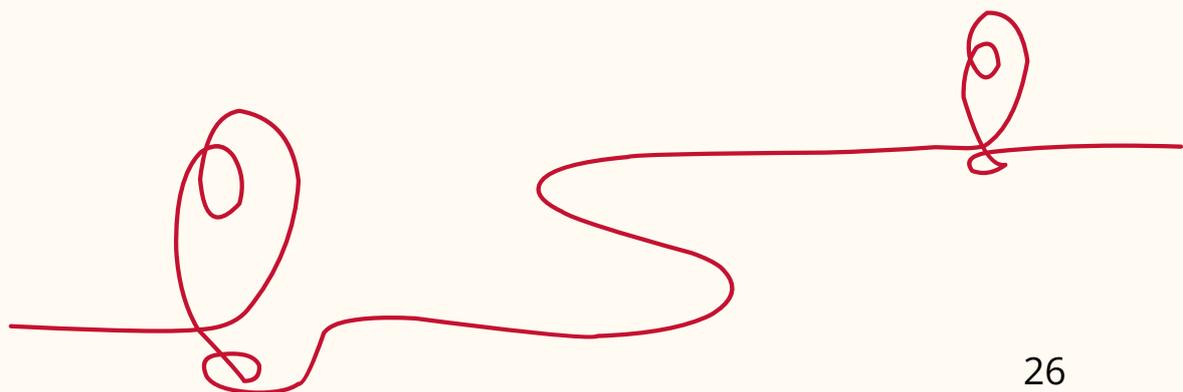
Our Vision: What Implementation Would Achieve

By 2029:

- Funding cycles move to minimum three years as recommended in [SCVO's Fair Funding campaign](#)
- Access increases from 5% to at least 20% of those entitled under the 2003 Act
- Geographic gaps addressed with provision in all prisons and rural areas
- Collective and citizen advocacy provision expanded significantly
- Children and young people with a right of access under the 2003 Act can access independent advocacy in all local authority areas
- Opt-out referral pathways piloted in key settings
- All Health and Social Care Partnerships have up-to-date strategic advocacy plans

By 2031:

- Data sharing guidance protects independence whilst demonstrating quality
- Collective advocacy established as legal right with sustainable funding
- Full implementation of SMHLR recommendations on independent advocacy
- Collective advocacy groups able to bring collective complaints and legal challenges
- National data collection demonstrates where provision meets need and where gaps remain





Conclusion

A Scotland Where Everyone's Voice Matters

“[Independent advocacy is] a voice, connecting communities and groups together with encouragement and no judgement.”

— Collective advocacy group member

Independent advocacy is not optional. It is a legal right, a proven investment, and essential infrastructure for a society where everyone can participate in the decisions that affect their lives.

The next Scottish Parliament can play its part in building independent advocacy provision that ensures:

- Everyone entitled to independent advocacy can access it
- Provision is sustainable, high-quality, and truly independent
- Collective and citizen advocacy thrive as preventative, community-building forces
- People's voices genuinely shape Scotland's policies, services, and future

This requires political will, adequate investment, and partnership with the independent advocacy movement. The evidence is clear. The solutions are known. What Scotland needs now is commitment to making rights a reality.

We call on all parties standing in the 2026 election to commit to making Scotland a country where everyone's voice can be heard.



Contact



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SIAA is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation
Charity number SC033576

This manifesto was written by SIAA staff drawing on policy work developed with member organisations, board members, and the independent advocacy movement across Scotland. It has been edited with the assistance of Claude (an AI language model) and reviewed for accuracy by SIAA staff.

