

by NLLIC Staff (Reviewed 2008)

*Advocacy- (ad'vo'kas'e) n. Recommendation.----1. Support and defense of a cause. 2. The act of pleading on behalf of another.*

Educating consumers about how to advocate is a fundamental principle of the Amputee Coalition of America. Oftentimes, the policies of insurance companies and government agencies wind up accidentally excluding those who require the most help. That is where the Amputee Coalition comes into the picture. We bridge the gap, empowering amputees through education, support, and referral services. By getting the word out about viable options, the ACA refers amputees and their concerned friends to the right organizations to get the assistance they need and deserve. In the event that the first attempt towards accomplishing goals or getting needs fulfilled fails, amputees must understand that there are other options. These are the steps we recommend to effective advocacy, whether acting on your own behalf or in the interest of a friend.

### **1. Educate yourself about the possibilities**

A good place to begin any effective inquiry is to educate yourself about the options you have. First, ask yourself what it is that you need. For instance, if you need funds for a prosthetic limb, begin by calling a prosthetist and finding out about costs. Next, find out what your insurance will cover. Many insurance companies will only partially fund prosthetic limbs, and you may have to contact additional organizations to compensate for what your insurance company will not pay. If you do not have insurance, you will have to contact government agencies like Medicare or the Department of Human Services, Vocational Rehabilitation, or Assistive Technology to find out about funding. You can also contact the ACA and we will provide you with a list of nonprofit, private organizations that sometimes fund prosthetic limbs. Once you develop a strategy, keep a diary. Collect every phone call and every letter in a daily log that you can refer to. Documentation is crucial when it comes to building a case for yourself.

### **2. Get support**

Never underestimate the power of support. Nothing changes your body as completely and permanently as limb loss. If you have just undergone a complete lifestyle transformation, you may not be in any condition to put up a struggle. Therefore, it is in your best interest to recruit and elicit help from the people surrounding you. More often than not, someone in your community, be they family, peer, or church member, will provide you with some sort of assistance. If someone offers you assistance, take their help. You are going to need it. The ACA works with local amputee education groups across the country to train volunteers for peer contact and provides start up information for support groups in every state. Someone nearby may be facing many of the same obstacles you are. Ask them how they did it.

National Limb Loss Information Center, a program of the Amputee Coalition of America

### ***3. Be persistent and patient***

If you are repeatedly rebuffed, do not give up. Someone will help you. You just have to find the right door to knock on. If all else fails you can contact your local congressman. The ACA has two other fact sheets entitled, “How Do I Get Help from My Congressional Representatives?” and “The Do’s and Don’ts of a Legislative Visit.” These fact sheets can be helpful. Sometimes the only way to change the rules is to approach the legislative bodies that make them. Through persistence and patience, you can change things, even if that change is gradual. At least you can rest by knowing that you have exhausted every resource. Remember though, the only person you have any control over is yourself. Reserve anger for the times when you really need it. Anger can be an effective tool but getting angry tends to shut doors rather than open them.

You can be your own best advocate. Educating yourself, and thereby empowering yourself, will help you to attain the goals needed to live a happy, productive life. Once organized, you will find the right path.

### ***4. Visit the ACA’s Advocacy Action Center***

<http://www.amputee-coalition.org/advocacy/index.html>.