



NAHAC Code of Ethics

The National Association of Healthcare Advocacy Consultants (NAHAC) is pleased to present this **Code of Ethics** for the Healthcare Advocacy profession. Adherence to this Code is a condition of Membership in NAHAC.

The National Association of Healthcare Advocacy Consultants (NAHAC) is an organization of professionals and consumers who share the goal of promoting safe, effective, and humane healthcare services. NAHAC represents professionals who work with individual clients who need assistance navigating through complex medical situations as healthcare advocates, patient advocates, patient navigators, case managers; those who work on behalf of communities and in legislative and health policy initiatives; and consumers and family caregivers. An advocate may work independently, in a medical setting, or on behalf of communities or disease-specific populations.

We have defined an advocate as a person providing services including, but not limited to, assisting clients or client groups at all levels of care in the healthcare system to make informed choices regarding available options and resources, maximizing clients' abilities to select among alternate treatment options by facilitating access to relevant information and clarification of clients' personal or cultural values and preferences.

Healthcare Advocacy shall not include directly imposing specific treatment choices, providing clinical second opinions; or direct, hands-on medical care of any type. The role of the advocate is to enable clients and client communities to actualize choices and access resources.

Advocacy is a dynamic field. The NAHAC Executive Committee is open to membership comments and may consider and revise these Guiding Principles and provide guidance to its members on additions and changes to the **Code of Ethics**. In addition, ethical questions and concerns of the public may be referred to the NAHAC Executive Committee for evaluation.

Guiding Principle 1: Advocacy

NAHAC Advocates work on behalf of the client with the intention of supporting optimal health outcomes. They establish a professional helping relationship with the client focused on defining and assessing the client's healthcare needs as well as providing information and guidance about navigating the healthcare system. For each client, the Healthcare Advocate assesses the well-being of the client and the physical, emotional, social, spiritual, financial and environmental needs of that client. The Advocate also evaluates how that client interacts with significant others.

The Healthcare Advocate will also assess client's living situation in terms of current or potential options. Once the assessment is complete, a recommended plan of care will be developed. Both the assessment and the recommendation will be shared and discussed with the client. The Advocate and the client will mutually agree on a plan and share it with relevant providers, significant others and additional resources to the extent necessary to maintain or improve the client's health and well-being. The role of the Healthcare Advocate is to advocate on behalf of the client as needed.

Guiding Principle 2: Transparency and Honest Disclosure

NAHAC Advocates are committed to integrity and total transparency in the conduct of their practices. The advocate has an obligation to be transparent about fees, training, education, experience, and credentials. The advocate must disclose any contractual relationships that may exist between the advocate and other services they might use to assist their clients.

Advocates have a special responsibility to assure that clients are fully aware of all possible conflicts of interest involved by the Advocate's conditions of employment.

NAHAC Advocates providing fee-for-service assistance are obligated to present a client or responsible family member with an Agreement that clearly defines the Advocate's scope of practice, fee schedule, and working arrangements.

Guiding Principle 3: Protecting Confidentiality and Privacy

NAHAC Advocates respect each client's right to privacy, and abide by all relevant laws and regulations relating to confidentiality of personal information. NAHAC Advocates shall at all times safeguard and protect the confidentiality of all medical records and communications with clients.

Guiding Principle 4: Fostering Autonomy

NAHAC Advocates shall treat all clients with compassion and respect. Foremost will be their client's personal values concerning care and the right to be involved in all decisions that affect their care. Advocates uphold and respect all clients' rights by promoting recognition of existing statutory rights, and supporting development of potential advancements of the rights of people and communities to receive fair treatment.

NAHAC Advocates are dedicated to promoting the autonomy and empowerment of their clients to exercise meaningful informed consent. Advocates strive to ensure that clients are fully aware of all care and treatment options, including potential risks, benefits, and available alternatives. Advocates will in all situations attempt to provide clients with all information that would facilitate informed decision-making. NAHAC Advocates respect the dignity and freedom of their client to make their own decisions grounded in the cultural, spiritual, and ethical context of that individual.

The NAHAC Advocate's role is to ensure that the client's wishes, if known, are the guiding force behind decisions on medical care. In the event a legally designated surrogate becomes the patient's decision-making agent, an advocate is encouraged to faithfully convey to the surrogate the client's relevant medical history (if needed) as well as any personal conversations in which the client may have expressed certain wishes to the advocate. While a NAHAC Advocate may not serve as the health care proxy or other such surrogate decision-maker for a current client, the Advocate may continue to serve their clients' interests by briefing the surrogate on any relevant statutory patients' rights and possible care options.

Guiding Principle 5: Provision of Competent Services

NAHAC Advocates have a responsibility to inform clients of their specific areas of proficiency, and only to advise clients within that area where the advocate has demonstrated expertise. If a client needs assistance in an area where the advocate does not have sufficient knowledge or training, the Advocate is obligated to refer the client to the appropriate system or resource for assistance.

NAHAC Advocates are committed to continuing their education in order to keep their knowledge and skills current. NAHAC Advocates ensure that they have adequate referral systems in place to assist clients who need services the advocate is unable to provide.

Guiding Principle 6: Avoidance of Impropriety and Maintenance of Professional Boundaries

NAHAC Advocates may not accept remuneration for making referrals to other providers or services, nor steer clients to products or services from which the advocate will profit financially or earn a commission. NAHAC Advocates may not accept paid advertising on their websites from outside product or service providers. Advocates may, however, inform clients of useful products or services after they have done due diligence on the product, service or provider and are satisfied with the quality and efficacy of the product or service and the integrity of the provider. Under no circumstances may an advocate require that the client purchase or subscribe to any outside service to be able to benefit from the services of the advocate.

NAHAC Advocates do not participate in dual relationships with their clients. NAHAC Advocates recognize and maintain boundaries that establish appropriate limits to professional relationships. When those professional boundaries are jeopardized, NAHAC Advocates assist the client in finding a substitute advocate and remove themselves from the situation.

Guiding Principle 7: Avoidance of Discriminatory Practices

Essential to the Profession of Advocacy is the belief that equal access to appropriate healthcare and treatment is the right of each individual. NAHAC Advocates are committed to strive for equal access without regard to age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or social-economic status.

NAHAC Advocates are committed to assisting clients of all cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Advocates shall be mindful of the cultural context of clients, respecting their individual perspectives, and employing effective cross-cultural communication techniques.

Guiding Principle 8: Continued Learning

NAHAC Advocates are committed to continued learning to hone professional expertise and maintain knowledge of current conditions in a rapidly changing healthcare environment.

NAHAC Advocates participate in the continued learning of their colleagues by sharing information and resources for the benefit of the membership and the public we serve.