



IMCA READY STEADY GO!

A HANDY GUIDE FOR ADVOCACY ORGANISATIONS BIDDING FOR IMCA CONTRACTS

The first few tenders for IMCA (Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy) services have started to appear in the national press. The message coming out of the Department of Health is that they expect the majority of local IMCA services to be commissioned by the end of the year. A series of regional seminars has been organised to inform commissioners about the new service and to issue guidance about the commissioning arrangements. But what about the advocacy schemes?

There has been precious little advice, information or guidance for providers of advocacy about if, when and how to apply to run IMCA services locally. This means that advocacy schemes may find themselves ill-equipped to respond quickly and positively to the commissioning process.

In light of this, Action for Advocacy has produced *'IMCA – Ready, Steady, Go!'* - a handy guide to bidding for IMCA contracts, aimed specifically at advocacy organisations. The guide contains a checklist of ideas and issues for schemes that may be thinking about becoming IMCA providers. We hope that advocacy schemes both large and small will find the guide useful and informative.

Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy (IMCA) services are due to come into operation on the 1st April 2007 as required by the Mental Capacity Act (2005). The IMCA service must be available 52 weeks of the year. These services must be available to provide independent advocacy when:

- decisions are made about serious medical treatment and changes of residence
- the person involved is judged to lack the capacity to make those decisions
- the person has no family or friends that are suitable to be contacted.

The starting date of 1st April means that the timescale for commissioning is very tight. The level of funds allocated to each Local Authority area has already been set and lead commissioning officers within local authorities have been identified. Commissioners have received guidance and some are already looking at ways of publicising tenders.

If you are thinking of applying you need to think about some things now!

1. How well do you understand the Mental Capacity Act, especially the section on providing an IMCA service? If you've only taken a cursory interest to date, now may be the time to become an IMCA expert. Read all the available information including the Mental Capacity Act Draft Code of Practice. Make sure your trustees and advocates understand it too.
2. Read the commissioning guidance and draft tender specification for IMCA available from the Department of Health website. It is highly likely that Local Authority commissioners will use these model documents to inform their commissioning given the extremely tight timescales. Why develop your own stuff from scratch when you can use the (really quite good) model stuff from the Department of Health?
3. Do you know who is going to commission IMCA locally? If not, you need to find the lead commissioning officer in your Local Authority. If this is proving difficult, try contacting your regional CSIP lead. We can provide details.
4. When you know the name and contact details of your commissioner, **RING THEM UP STRAIGHT AWAY** to register your interest in providing IMCA. The commissioning deadlines are very tight and they may appreciate the direct approach. Even if you don't have such a good relationship, **RING THEM UP ANYWAY**. What's the worst that could happen?

- 5.** Find out how much money is available locally. This is now public information, so ask your commissioner, ring the Department of Health or contact A4A. Also, check whether your local commissioner is just going to commission IMCA or whether they are planning a more thorough review of their advocacy commissioning priorities.
- 6.** Think about how you will present your organisation as part of the bidding process. Do you have a track record in providing non-instructed advocacy? Are all your policies and procedures up to date? Are your accounts in order? Do you have monitoring figures that you can refer to? Do you have good supervision arrangements in place?
- 7.** If you have a quality mark such as Investors in People or the Community Legal Service Quality Mark, or work within a set of standards, make sure the commissioner knows this. Action for Advocacy's 'Quality Standards for Advocacy Schemes' and 'Code of Practice for Advocates' booklets could be useful resources to refer to here.
- 8.** Identify and mention some of the qualities that you feel make your organisation stand out such from other potential bidders. These could include training programmes you already run, knowledge of local services, ability to work with a diverse range of people, the way in which you are accountable or having a flexible pool of advocates who could be trained as IMCAs.
- 9.** Think about the implications for your constitution. If you are client-group or area-specific, will you be prepared to deliver an IMCA service to the full range of client groups affected (i.e. mental health, older people, learning disability, acquired brain injury)? Would you consider operating outside of your geographical area? Does your constitution allow this? If not, you will need to amend it. Advice on this is available via the Charity Commission or your local CVS.
- 10.** If you are a small scheme, consider whether you would be prepared to go into partnership with other small schemes in your area or even in other areas in order to provide an IMCA service. Many commissioners are keen on the idea of cross-authority commissioning, especially where the financial allocation is relatively small. They will be looking for an organisation or consortium of organisations that can fulfil the requirements of the IMCA role. This includes the service being available 52 weeks of the year, and covering all the aforementioned client groups.

11. If you are going to make a consortium bid make sure that the management structure is very clear. This will need to include who is responsible for allocating referrals that fall between the normal criteria of existing groups.

12. What is your reputation like with local health and social care provider agencies? Initial feedback from the IMCA pilots suggests that having positive working relationships with other professionals, especially healthcare professionals, is crucial to the success of the IMCA service. So if you've burned your bridges with the local hospital, providing IMCA is going to be much more of a struggle than if you have a good relationship and reputation there.

13. Be aware of the timescales. Could you put your bid together in the allocated time (the DOH is expecting that most contracts will be in place by 31st December)? Even if you win the contract, do you have systems in place to advertise for and recruit IMCAs for a start date of 1st April or before? Would you be planning to recruit new staff or use existing advocates? What will this mean for your other services? **Don't rush into IMCA just because it's new money.** Consider whether it fits with your other activities and your capacity to manage new work.

14. IMCAs will need access to relevant training and good quality casework supervision as well as emotional and peer support. Are you confident you will be able to provide this? IMCA is a highly specialised role, largely untested and very much working at the 'sharp end' of health and social care services. There will be training resources available to schemes, including a comprehensive induction package for all new IMCAs currently being developed by A4A on behalf of the Social Care Institute for Excellence, but it is still important to consider the ongoing support needs of IMCAs.

Useful Contacts

Action for Advocacy 020 7820 7868 www.actionforadvocacy.org.uk

Department of Health IMCA@dh.gsi.gov.uk www.dh.gov.uk/imca

Charities Commission 0845 300 0218 www.charity-commission.gov.uk

National Association for Voluntary and Community Action 0114 278 6636
www.navca.org.uk

Action for Advocacy acts as the central point of information on independent advocacy for advocacy providers, the wider voluntary and community sectors, policy makers and members of the public looking for advocacy support.

The four main aims of the organisation are:

- 1. Supporting the development of independent advocacy schemes.**
- 2. Promoting good practice and information sharing across the independent advocacy sector.**
- 3. Developing and supporting networking between advocates and advocacy schemes.**
- 4. Advocating for advocacy at a strategic and policy level.**

In order to achieve our broad aims we provide the following services:

- A quarterly magazine 'Planet Advocacy' which is circulated to over 700 organisations nationwide**
- Monthly e-mail bulletins to over 1000 contacts and a regularly updated website that receives around 1500 'hits' a month.**
- A range of advocacy and related training courses and issue based forums, seminars and conferences to advocates and others. In total 400 people were trained last year.**
- One to one capacity building support to small and user-led advocacy organisations**
- Technical support and telephone advice to advocacy schemes, commissioners and policymakers**
- Policy guidance to the advocacy sector and Government**
- Signposting members of the public to advocacy services in their area**
- Production of The Advocacy Charter, Code of Practice for Advocates and Quality Standards for Advocacy Schemes.**



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