



For people with intellectual  
and developmental disabilities



# Position Statement Self-Determination

People with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities<sup>1</sup> have the same right to self-determination as all people. They must have opportunities and experiences that enable them to exert control in their lives and to advocate on their own behalf.

## Issue

Many of our constituents have not had the opportunity or the support to control choices and decisions about important aspects of their lives. Instead, they are often overprotected and involuntarily segregated. Many of these people have not had opportunities to learn the skills and have the experiences that would enable them to take more personal control and make choices. The lack of such learning opportunities and experiences has impeded the right of people with these disabilities to become participating, valued, and respected members of their communities. Furthermore, state monitoring and licensure policies and practices may be contrary to the principles of self-determination.

## Position

Our constituents, as Self Advocates, have the same right to self-determination as all people and must have the freedom, authority, and support to exercise control over their lives. To this end, they:

- Must have the opportunity to advocate for themselves with the knowledge that their desires will be heard and respected;
- Must have opportunities to acquire skills and develop beliefs that enable them to take greater personal control;
- Must be active participants in decision-making about their lives;
- Must be supported, assisted, and empowered to vote and to become active members and leaders on community boards, committees, and agencies;
- Must have the primary leadership role in setting the policy direction for the self-determination movement;
- Must have the option to direct their own care and allocate available resources;

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- Must be able to hire, train, manage, and fire their personal assistants; and
- Must have the opportunity to be involved in governmental decisions that have an impact on their lives.

Additionally, in working with our constituents:

- Families and substitute decision-makers should be supported to understand the concept and implementation of self-determination, including the limits on their powers;
- Disability organizations should make self-determination a priority and include this important concept in their conferences, publications, advocacy, training, services, policies, and research; and
- Governments should regularly review and revise laws, regulations, policies, and funding systems to promote self-determination. The affected individuals must be involved in these reviews and revisions.

<sup>1</sup>“People with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities” refers to those defined by AAIDD classification and DSM IV. In everyday language they are frequently referred to as people with cognitive, intellectual and/or developmental disabili-

ties although the professional and legal definitions of those terms both include others and exclude some defined by DSM IV.

**Adopted:**

**Board of Directors, The Arc  
August 4, 2008**

**Board of Directors, AAIDD  
August 18, 2008**

**Congress of Delegates, The Arc of  
the United States  
November 8, 2008**

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