



# Consumer and Community Participation: Challenges and Opportunities

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# CONSUMER PARTICIPATION

## Challenges and Opportunities



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# HEALTH CONSUMERS' COUNCIL

- The Health Consumers' Council is an independent community based organisation representing the consumers' 'voice' in health policy planning, research & service delivery. The Council advocates on behalf of consumers to government, doctors, other health professionals, hospitals & the wider health system.

# KEY ACTIVITIES

- Advocacy for individuals having problems accessing the health system
- The recruiting, training and maintaining of consumer representatives on a range of local, state and national committees
- The review of health policy from a consumer perspective

# **BENEFITS OF CONSUMER PARTICIPATION**

## **More effective & efficient service delivery & policies**

- Accurate identification of consumer needs
- Identification of gaps in existing services which is essential to directing a services' focus or policy development towards groups whose needs are not being met
- More appropriate allocation of resources
- Making services responsive to the community they serve

# Better health outcomes

- Consumer participation, through establishment of better communication and more equal and constructive relationships between providers and consumers, empowers consumers to take responsibility for their own health

# Social justice

- Consumers have the right to receive high quality health services
- It is beneficial to the well-being of individuals and communities to participate in decisions that affect them and their communities
- Consumer participation provides a means through which more equal distribution of power and resources can be achieved

# How to Marginalise and Disempower Consumer Representatives

- Give short notice of meeting details
- Send meeting papers too late or not at all
- Have a Chair who doesn't understand or value consumer participation
- Use jargon and technical terms
- Don't provide any out of pocket expenses
- Send large documents by email
- Make sure you only have one representative on the committee

# **How to Marginalise and Disempower consumer representatives cont.**

- Make sure the consumer is seated where she/he will not be able to get the Chair's attention
- Discuss matters and make decisions outside of meetings. Make sure the consumer doesn't participate in this
- Forget to include items raised by the consumer representative on the agenda

# Concerns that Providers may have about Consumer Participation

- The cost of involving consumers
- The belief that consumers are there just to be critical
- Concern about creating more work for provider staff
- Concern that consumers are going to have a different point of view
- Concern about confidentiality
- The consumer having a narrow personal agenda

# How to Help Consumers be Effective

- Establish a relationship with the consumer representative
- Ensure that all members of the group treat each other courteously and that everyone's ideas are treated seriously
- Make sure that decisions are made with the whole group working together and reaching agreement
- Make sure that every member of the group has an opportunity to speak on each issue

# How to Help Consumers be Effective Cont.

- Apply the rules of natural justice
- Make it clear to all members precisely what is confidential and what can be talked about and suggest how this might be done
- Make sure everyone has the access to the same information. This may mean making additional information available to those who are not part of the health service sector

# How to Help Consumers be Effective Cont.

- Build cohesion and trust within the group
- Deal immediately and effectively with conflict, difficult situations and difficult people
- Ensure that documents are provided to consumer representatives in good time for meeting preparation.

# Best Practice Principles

- Effective consumer participation requires commitment and leadership from management and clinical opinion leaders
- The commitment and support of staff is essential to successful involvement of consumers
- Internal policies and procedures are required to support and encourage consumers to participate, though those consumers who choose not to participate can do so without this decision impacting on the services they receive.

# Best Practice Principles Cont.

- Consumer participation requires adequate resourcing
- Staff participation in decision making is an essential prerequisite to an organisational structure that is supportive of consumer participation
- Staff education and support programs are essential to enhancing their skill in working more effectively with consumers
- Consumer education and support programs are essential to enhancing their skill in working more effectively with staff