

CONSUMER PARTICIPATION POLICY

DEFINITIONS

'Consumer' refers to anyone who either directly or indirectly utilises the service, and anyone who may use the service in the future.

Consumer participation is about supporting consumer empowerment in health care for improved health and well-being. It may include involving consumers in decision making, planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and review of a service.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure the service is guided in developing consumer participation for improved outcomes for consumers.

All staff of the service will be made aware of the service's consumer participation policy, and contribute to any review of the policy and procedures based on their applicability to practice.

RATIONALE

'Building and maintaining a high quality Alcohol & Other Drug service means that people managing and working in the system need to work together with consumers and the community to achieve sustainable improvements and maintain public confidence in the service.

A resource guide commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care identified 'four reasons why health care organisations should have a strong consumer focus and be involved in enhancing and responding to consumer participation.' These are:

- Participation is an ethical and democratic right;
- Participation improves service quality and safety and helps gain health service accreditation;
- Participation improves health outcomes;
- Participation makes services more responsive to the needs of consumers.

Not only is participation likely to lead to more appropriate and better quality service with better outcomes, but the very act of participating in health care decisions has been shown to improve outcomes for clients, irrespective of the treatment chosen.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Effective consumer participation includes:

- Consumers commenting and making assessments on all aspects of their care either through:
 - Having choice of service provision, once presented with a range of available options
 - Providing direct feedback to staff
 - Being involved in surveys
 - Participating in focus groups
 - Using the complaints process
 - Involvement in planning, delivery and evaluation of the service
- Selecting a consumer representative(s), who voices the consumer perspective, is able to refer back and receive guidance from their constituency, and is able to participate on:
 - A management committee; or
 - Other decision making processes on behalf of consumers

Consumer participation may apply to consumers negotiating the service that they receive, or involvement in any Organisational planning situation. It may fall within the continuum of:

- Informing consumer(s) of plans and decisions made;
- Seeking feedback/consulting with consumer(s) to sanction the plans or decisions made;
- Making changes to plans and decisions made on the basis of consultation/feedback received from the consumer(s);
- Jointly planning and making decisions with consumer(s);
- Identifying a problem and any limitations of any approach, and having consumer(s) plan and make decisions to address the problem;
- Asking consumer(s) to identify the problem and supporting them to plan/make any decisions to address the problem.

Consumer participation may require:

- The service acknowledging the potential fears and power imbalances in the relationship between consumers and providers and striving towards a change in culture towards a more collaborative approach;
- Commitment from all staff, and a willingness and/or preparedness by the service and staff to be responsive to consumer needs and make appropriate change;
- Training for staff and consumer representatives on maximising participation;
- Assessment, and possible change, of the existing service structure;
- Accessible information and information sharing to enhance any participation;

- Multiple strategies, reflecting the complex variation of the consumers accessing the service;
- Consumer engagement in deciding the most appropriate participation model(s) to adopt;
- Clarity about the service's capacity to inform consumer involvement and respond to consumer concerns.

In the case of the residential program, the Therapeutic Community model is dependant on significant consumer involvement. Residents will be encouraged and supported to engage in all aspects of the program.

POLICY STATEMENT

Palmerston Association is committed to actively encouraging effective consumer participation with the aim of improved outcomes for consumers.

Consumer comments and feedback will be sought (guided by consumer focused policies), recorded, and reviewed for organisational planning processes.

Consumer representatives will be selected on the basis of their representativeness with the overall consumer group or specific population group, ability to voice the consumer perspective, ability to refer back and receive guidance from their constituency, and availability to participate.