

Consumer involvement on committees

Information for the **Chair of committee** that involve Consumer Partners

Information for Chairs of BHS committees.

This document is intended to give you, as Committee Chair, a more in depth understanding of consumer participation on BHS committees and the responsibility of the chair and other members on the committee.

Who are consumers?

The term Consumer refers to any current, past or future patient, resident, client, carer/family and/or young person of Ballarat Health Services and includes our Grampians region. Additionally, a **Consumer Partner** is someone from our community who would like to engage with Ballarat Health Services and are looking to assist us to improve our systems, processes, programs and services from their perspective. Consumer Partners have completed the BHS Consumer Partnership Program orientation process and choose what they would like to participate in.

Why is Consumer Partnership important?

Having a Consumer Partnership Program leads to active consumer participation and will result in more accessible, innovative and effective health care. We need consumers at all levels of the development, implementation and evaluation of health strategies and programs as its integral to their success. BHS Strategic Plan 2017–2022 highlights the importance of consumer participation within our service and who better to help us improve our planning, design, delivery and evaluation of the health services we provide than the people who use our service?

Benefits of engaging consumers:

- Gives you critical information about how your services are perceived and received as well as the impact of your services
- Improves the quality of your services, programs and projects
- Builds relationships with your community and the people who use your services
- Improves health outcomes for your clients.

Consumer participation

Consumer participation occurs when consumers are meaningfully involved in decision-making about their care and treatment, or providing input on decisions making about services delivery, health policy and planning, or about the broader wellbeing of themselves and the community (Department of Human Services, 2006)

Consumer participation happens in many ways, formally and informally. It can also happen on a number of levels:

- Individual level – on decisions about own care, self-management
- Unit or Program level – feedback for service improvements or new developments
- Organisational level – policy, new service, access
- Broader community level – advocacy in consumer and community groups, participation in state-wide organisations, government department processes.

There are a number of government policies, reporting and legislative requirements as well as accreditation standards which mandate or guide the health sector to formally involve consumer in areas such as service planning, delivery and evaluation, workforce training and health information development. Refer to POL0074 – Partnering with Consumers for more information.

Planning to involve consumers on your committees

Many health service committees are dominated by health professionals. Involving consumers on committee will bring new views – from critical stakeholders – to the table, and assist in developing ongoing partnership between consumers and your health service. A committee structure provides an opportunity to move beyond one-off feedback to a more interactive approach, and allows consumers to have a direct input into decision-making processes.

The role of a consumer on a committee

The role of the consumer on a committee is to provide a consumer perspective on the issues being discussed and recommendations being made. The committee should ensure that the impact on service users is always a central part of its considerations.

It is important that the Chair ensures that all members of the committee understand the consumer's role and treat the consumer as a peer.

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Recruiting consumers

The process for engaging a consumer on your committee is as follows:

- Complete an internal request form - [Click here](#)
- Assign a key contact or lead for the committee
- Return form to safety&innovation@bhs.org.au
- Meet with the interested Consumer/s Partners and the Consumer Partnership Officer to determine the most appropriate consumer to join the committee

On boarding consumers

- Once the Consumer Partner is appointed to the position contact should be made to discuss any support the consumer might need to participate. Do they need support to attend the meeting, do they need IT support, do they need debriefing after the meeting etc
- Update the Consumer Partners details onto the emailing list for the committee and send invite to the Consumer Partner for the upcoming meetings
- Arrange a debriefing meeting with Consumer Partner after the first 3 meetings (or longer if needed). Or after a critical event in a meeting that the Consumer Partnership Officer may not observe (deaths or other serious incidents reported, sharing by consumer of particular personal or traumatising past history, observed or experienced conflict)

Continuous support for consumers

- Ensure Consumer Partner receives a proper introduction to all committee members at the first meeting and to any other members who might not be in attendance
- Ensure that all acronyms and documents are explained to the Consumer Partner in a way they understand
- Check in with the Consumer Partner regularly to ensure they are travelling well with the discussions and feel comfortable participating in the meetings
- If you need any additional support please contact the Consumer Partnership Officer on 5320 8571

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References

This brochure has been adapted from a consumer document located on the Health Issues Centre website <https://hic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/HIC-Involving-consumers-on-health-service-committees-.pdf>