

POLICY STATEMENT 12

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FOR CONSUMER AND CARER REPRESENTATIVES WITHIN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

BACKGROUND:

The history of skills development for consumer and carer participation varies across programs in the health sector and within the mental health sector.

Successful consumer and carer participation requires adequate education and training. Consumers and carers need to feel that they have adequate skills to 'mix it' with those whose professional status confers a kind of automatic authority.

One of the most important things that consumers and carers need to learn is that their opinions and ideas are valuable. Consumers and carers need to feel empowered in order to contribute to the representative processes.

Consumer and carer training and skills development gives the individual the chance to step out of everyday roles and meet with health professionals, administrators and managers as equals on neutral ground.

For consumers, carers and providers, training can be empowering. There can be honest and open discussion of what needs to change and ideas about how best to overcome obstacles, by sharing on more equal terms. Consumer and carer perspectives are an important way of respecting and valuing their energies and contribution.

One of the keys to successful and effective consumer and carer participation in service provision is adequate and appropriate training.

EXPERTISE OF CONSUMER AND CARER PARTICIPANTS

One of the keys to successful and effective consumer and carer participation in service provision is adequate and appropriate training in the skills and knowledge needed to be able to participate effectively. Consideration could be given to courses run by experienced consumer and carer trainers. Very often the most appropriate training probably comes from other consumers and carers already involved in advocacy.

Topics that need to be covered in consumer and carer training include:

- The context for consumer and carer representation;
- Discussion of specific issues relevant to services delivered;
- Understanding the role and responsibilities of a consumer or carer representative;
- The opportunity in providing a voice for private mental health consumers and carers;
- Ways to participate including an effective voice in the service delivery process;
- The opportunities for participation in decision-making processes;
- Committee process, for example protocols and the role of the chairperson;
- public speaking;



- Building skills in policy reading and reporting.

Consumer perspectives and representation are important topics to be covered in training sessions. Since establishing open and equal dialogue between staff and consumers is a major aspect, it is important that training includes sessions in which staff views and issues can be considered. Interested staff can be invited to participate in training.

SKILLS, STRATEGIES AND TOOLS

Being informed about processes is critical, but consideration needs to be given to those personal attributes that are necessary to succeed in the role of consumer or carer representatives.

The following personal skills need to be developed:

- **Advocacy and the individual**
Assertiveness, problem solving, personal organisation, communication skills
- **Getting organised**
Briefing, debriefing, barriers, finding information, managing change
- **Specific activities**
Report writing, being a layperson among experts
- **Advocacy and organisation**
Group development, team development, and leadership

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are a number of organisational matters that need to be addressed in relation to training courses. They relate to the amount of time being allocated and the employment of 'expert' presenters. Consumers and carers appreciate the opportunity to experience the talents of a presenter. They appreciate being valued enough to have such an 'expert'.

The training aims to develop confidence in representing a consumer or carer perspective, develop negotiation skills as a consumer or carer advocate and increase the ability of consumers and carers to develop and maintain a personal network that supports the representative role.

Lived Experience Australia supports the principle that consumer and carer participation requires appropriate skills development to be successful.

Policy:

- Lived Experience Australia supports the principle that consumer and carer participation requires appropriate support and skills development to be successful.
- That consumer and carer representatives are supported to access formal training.

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