

Tips on working with consumers/community members

ENGAGE, CONSULT, EMPOWER

Hi there. We are consumers. We are taking the time out of our busy, everyday lives to share our experiences and ideas on how to make health services better for us and other people who use your services.

We would like to share some tips on how to make it easy for us to work with you.

We want genuine engagement and not be part of a 'tick a box' activity

Timing

- Be flexible with meeting times...ask when it is convenient for us to attend a meeting. Many of us have to take public transport (sometimes from outside SESLHD). If possible, schedule meetings to avoid early morning and peak hours.
- Please make sure the venue is accessible to public transport and if I have a disability, I can get to the room.
- If you need to cancel, please give me as much notice as possible. At least the day before. If you cancel on the day, still offer me a voucher/bank voucher if one has been offered for this activity.
- Please provide us with a phone number so I can ring you if I have to cancel at the last minute due to sickness or emergency.

Payments

Did you know we are volunteers? Please ask us if receiving paid participation will help us to take part and if we would like our travel and/or parking costs covered.

Finding Our Way

Please provide clear directions and a map to help us find our way to you. Also please provide a number for us to call if we get lost.

Information you provide

- Please make sure the information you give us is written in plain language and you explain medical terminology or any acronyms used.
- Please make sure we can access the information you provide. Give us the option of having documents mailed out. It may not be possible to download and print large documents on our home printers. If you send us large documents, then please provide a 1-2 page summary.

Diversity

- Make meetings culturally appropriate. Ask various community groups what sort of meetings work best for them.
- Please don't have just one consumer. Invite a range of consumers from differing backgrounds to participate.
- Have a diversity of staff involved by including doctors, allied health and support staff and not just nurses. Try to include a range of staff. Invite allied and support staff, not just medical professionals.

Please make it as easy as possible for us to participate.

Feedback

If you have consulted us, let us know what you have done with the information we provided. If we know you used the information to improve services we are more likely to participate again in the future.

Briefing

Meet with us 10 minutes before the meeting starts to explain who is going to be present, the purpose of meeting, answer any questions we have about the information provided, clarify any terms etc. This is particularly important if any of us are new to the committee/project/program/activity. Providing a briefing will help make the whole process less intimidating and increase the likelihood we will contribute.

Safety

- Please treat us with decency and respect.
- Be patient with us...sometimes we need a bit of help to feel safe and ok to participate.

Contributions

- We need to feel valued and that our contribution matters.
- Make it easy for us to contribute. We don't want to have to shout to be heard. Use a range of group work processes to get input from everyone present.
- Encourage individual consumers and groups to share experiences, lead discussions, and introduce others to new ideas and practices. Be truly inclusive.

Bureaucratise is intimidating, off-putting, obscure and boring. We understand that there needs to be an agenda and some structure to meetings but it would be good to loosen it up as much as possible. This would enliven discussion and encourage questions and freer participation. Adapt, experiment and engage!

Courtesy

Please have water, tea and coffee available.

Good communication

- Look at us and really listen to what we have to say.
- Please don't look at your computers and smart phones.
- Please don't talk down to us.
- Communication is a two way street. Keep us informed. Explain what is going on and why things have changed or stopped.
- Please don't assume our level of knowledge and understanding. Despite being volunteers, many of us have extensive experience and will often research topics before a meeting.

Two-way street

It needs to be worthwhile and helpful to everyone. Be open to us telling you how you can do better and tell us what we can do to support you better.

Relationship Building

Do something different to engage with consumers...it is not just about formal meetings – have a community 'get together' – bring a plate or get together over a cup of tea...provide more informal opportunities to get to know people and what is important for them.

Invest in your consumers

- Support consumers to attend training.
- Find out how consumers would like to contribute.
- If a consumer is not familiar with your facility, please give them a tour.

Making a meaningful contribution

- Don't even start if it is just going to be a 'tick the box' exercise. It is irritating and a waste of time. If you have not had experience with working consumers consider getting some training and support via the Community Partnerships Manager (Email: SESLHD-YourVoice@health.nsw.gov.au).
- Talk directly to people who use a particular service (e.g. if you are interested in improving mental health services, talk to people who have used these services).

"Thank you for your commitment to allowing our voices to be heard. Our best hope is for a better health system for everyone".

~ Glenda, Joy, Scott and Sue

SESLHD consumer representatives

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