

Client Representatives

Tools for Partnering with Clients



Involving client representatives in planning and decision making is essential to creating services that engage, include and listen to all members of the community.

Why do we need client representatives?

- There is no single way to partner with client representatives. There are many ways clients can be involved in initiatives and the governance, decision-making and reviews of services.
- Representatives may be past or present service users, family members, carers, elders, community leaders or workers but will ideally have expertise and lived experience.
- It is important to consider what motivates a client to represent their community. Some clients may not regard their personal involvement as meaningful, but may relate to activities that allow the needs of their community to be represented.
- Partnerships like these are important to build trust and foster open lines of communication.
- Engagement of client representatives results in more effective decision-making, increased accountability, improved relationships and outcomes and system sustainability.

Approaches to Engaging Consumer Representatives

Consumer representatives may be engaged:

- as a member of an existing committee,
- as part of an advisory group to a project or for a specific task or focus group, or
- as part of their own committee.

The following steps should be considered when engaging a client representative in any capacity:

1. *Why are you engaging a client representative/s?*

- a. What is the purpose of the committee/group?
- b. What is the scope of work?
- c. What skills, knowledge and levels of expertise will the representative need?
- d. How many representatives do you need?

- e. What commitments (time, travel) will the representative need to make to fulfil their role?

2. *How will you select a candidate/s?*

- a. How will you source a representative? Will you engage an agency, ask for expressions of interest or recommendations?
- b. If you have multiple candidates, how will you select one? Do you need a selection committee? Candidates should be able to demonstrate that they meet the requirements of the selection criteria and are able to represent client views for their chosen group or community.

3. *How will you provide the representative with the appropriate information?*

- a. Chosen representatives need to have an appropriate induction and fully understand the terms of their agreement to participate as a client representative.
- b. They may need to be provided with fact sheets, annual reports and any other relevant documentation to ensure they understand the organisation, the committee or group and the scope of work.
- c. Representatives need to know who to contact if they need additional information or support.

4. *Managing ongoing support and feedback*

- a. The client representative should be informed on what actions were taken a results of their involvement.
- b. Keeping confidentiality in mind, is the client allowed to share their experiences as a representative and outcomes with their community? This could be key to future partnerships and relationships.
- c. How will any complaints or feedback be handled? Consumer representatives need to have a system in place to discuss anything they feel is relevant.



Things to Think About When Working With Consumer Representatives

- *Barriers.* The people most likely to participate in community representation usually have a strong point of view and capacity to participate. It is important that we consider all members of the community and any barriers that may prevent their involvement e.g. transport, childcare, language.
- *Support.* Following on from barriers, organisations need to provide adequate support to ensure the client representative can perform their duties as part of the committee or group. This may range from ensuring all acronyms are explained to the representative or taking into account cultural considerations.
- *Confidentiality.* The same levels of confidentiality that apply to a committee or group will also apply to client representatives. They are accountable for maintaining confidentiality.
- *Conflict of interest.* A conflict of interest may prejudice or appear to prejudice a client's ability perform their duties responsibly. Consumer representatives should be subjected to the same standards as any other committee or group member. Conflicts of interest may be unavoidable, but as a minimum standard, they should be openly and formally disclosed.
- *Remuneration.* Representatives should not be financially disadvantaged by their participation as a representative. Any reasonable out-of-pocket expenses should be covered by the organisation.

Additional Resources

Here are some additional resources available to help engage client representatives:

[Developing a consumer and community engagement strategy: a toolkit for Hospital and Health Services](#)

[Health Consumers Queensland: Consumer Representatives Program Agency Handbook](#)

[Patient-centred Care: Improving Quality And Safety By Focusing Care On Patients And Consumers](#)