



Mercy Health
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Consumer Advisor Conference 2015 Summary



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**Consumer Advisor
Conference
• 2015 •**

Coming together,

sharing experiences and building our networks

In partnership with Consumer Advisors, Mercy Health and the Health Issues Centre held the first Consumer Advisor Conference in Melbourne on 4 November 2015. The aim was to bring Consumer Advisors together to share their experiences and explore the questions and issues that matter to them.

More than 70 health services consumers explored ideas and questions raised by Consumer Advisors. The following is a summary of the discussions held on the day. The aim of the summary is to highlight the key points made by Consumers Advisors, including shared understandings and main themes.



“Thank you for providing this space for sharing, networking, support and hope.”

On the day

Consumer Advisor Conference 2015



Opening address

The opening address was delivered by Julia Trimboli, Group Executive Director Leadership & Mission at Mercy Health.



Keynote speaker

The keynote speaker was Tracy Bartram, a popular radio presenter in Perth and Melbourne. Tracy is the mother to a 16-year-old boy with Tourette syndrome. She is also Patron of the Women's Circus, the Magdalene Foundation and Entertainment Assist. Tracy shared her personal journey as a consumer and carer within health services.

The schedule of the day

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What does it mean to be a Consumer Advisor in 2015?

This session aimed to understand the difficulties and opportunities Consumer Advisors currently experience. Facilitated by Bec Jolly, Manager of Community Participation at Mercy Health, the session explored the roles and responsibilities of Consumers Advisors and the challenges they face along the way. Participants agreed Consumer Advisors would benefit from:

- a state-wide peer contact list to help networking, sharing, mentoring and supporting each other
- an online tool to enable participants to talk to one another online and share ideas and concepts
- opportunities to share their stories and inspire other consumers and health services staff
- access to education and support to help develop consumer capacity and interest in the role.

Consumer Advisors describe their roles

Comments from the floor

“The role has had many different names Consumer Consultant, Advocate and Advisor.”

“It has moved from a ‘volunteer role’ to a more empowered role helping to improve the care and services provided to community. The change has occurred due to hospital management making it part of practice and the introduction of the National Standards but there is still a long way to go.”

“The role has fluctuated over the years there is a lot of banging your head against the wall.”

“Many years ago when I joined the Committee we made a lot of mistakes along the way and learnt a great deal. We had great opportunities to feed into policy and practices at the local level and make changes there based on the community need.”



Consumer Advisors said their responsibilities included:

- helping with surveys
- reviewing brochures
- gathering feedback from patients and families
- acting as a volunteer guide or concierge for patients and families
- fundraising for projects
- participating in committees as a member or chair
- engaging with the board or escalate questions to other committees
- being involved in research.

What resources support and grow Consumer Advisors?

This session aimed to identify the development priorities for Consumer Advisors. Facilitated by Nicky Barry, Coordinator of Consumer Participation at the Health Issues Centre, the session explored the needs of Consumer Advisors and any supports currently in place. Participants agreed Consumer Advisors would benefit from:

- a conversation about best practice driven by Consumer Advisors
- learning about consumer participation from different sectors
- exploring strategies that encourage consumer engagement in the health sector
- greater acknowledgement of the contribution consumers make to the health services. This could take the form of an annual award, including for staff who demonstrate exceptional commitment to person-centred care.

Consumer Advisors talk about the hot topics *Comments from the floor*

Budget & Remuneration

“Set a budget each financial year that can be allocated to consumer activity. Consumer activities cannot run on nothing!”

“Remuneration should be considered to attend meetings. Often there are associated costs so it is important that it is cost neutral including costs associated with meals, transport (particularly in rural areas) and child care.”

“It is important to acknowledge the time that consumers put in. How do we acknowledge people’s expertise? We were given Coles Myer vouchers as a thank you. How do we value the consumer input? Consider remuneration versus volunteering”

Engagement & Advocacy

“Consumer Advisors can work to disseminate information to increase the voice of consumers. It’s important to engage the community. Sharing ideas with other consumers is also important”

“How does the consumer become empowered and use their voice?”

Orientation

“Ongoing orientation is required, not just at the start. Consider intervals such as three, six, 12 months, etc.”

“Staff need orientation to the consumer space as well, not just the consumers.”

“Mentoring is considered an important component in the consumer space”



Consumer Advisors talk about the hot topics (continued...)

Comments from the floor

Regional Forums

"Sometimes there are barriers such as who will organise it? Often it is left up to Consumer Advisory Committees. Consumers need to be engaged in such (regional) forums and the Health Service need to be on board"

Networking

"It's important that there is interaction between different consumer groups. Language and cultural diversity needs to be considered."

Question: "How do we encourage consumers in communities?" Suggestion: "Drawing on local networks is important"

Transport

"Health services should remember to communicate how to get to get to places. Who can organise transport for Consumer Advisors. Is there a liaison role that can help?"

"In rural areas transport is top of the list in terms of Consumer Advisor needs. In the city there are other obstacles such as car parking."

"Transport and travel is fundamental to connecting with the health service and other consumers. Due to travel barriers or transport issues and associated costs, there is a misconception that 'those people' don't want to participate. There are significant issues for Consumer Advisors when there is no transport"



Access

"Accommodating people's needs is essential. Teleconferencing is important and allows greater access. Appropriate locations for meetings are essential. Environment is important. Is a boardroom appropriate?"

Training

"Orientation is a must and the consumer needs a realistic understanding of why they are involved. The best support for consumers is talking in a language that is understood. Government needs to continue to encourage consumer participation as well. The sharing of knowledge among different sectors is essential."

Thinking about my role as a Consumer Advisor: how can I contribute?

This discussion aimed to consider the diversity and breadth of the Consumer Advisor Role. It was facilitated by Marianne Mahony, Chair of the Consumer Advisory Committee (CAC) at Mercy Health. Panelists included Linda Bone, Peer Support Worker at Break Thru People Solutions; Jacqui Gibson, Consumer Advisor at Southern Melbourne Primary Care Partnership; and Jane Power, member of Mercy Hospital for Women's Consumer Advisory Group. Panelists shared their journeys from consumer to Consumer Advisor, inspiring questions, comments and ideas from the audience.

Questions and comments inspired by the panel

Question: "How can we get CAC get involved with the floor staff?" Suggestion: "Find fun activities for Consumer Advisors to do"

"We need to establish a way of showing: You told us this. We suggested that. You listened and we made this change."

"We had good support at the time from senior management. In the early stages it was very overwhelming but we are now more confident in our role and still supported by senior management – but we have difficulty getting to the floor staff."

"Your intranet, could Consumer Advisors have access to it?"

"We need good relationships with the board and senior management."

"For the Quality of Care and Annual reports, have a committee with a consumer on it for planning and development, who then takes it back to the Consumer Advisory Committee"

The challenges of being heard as a consumer voice

Question: "How can we push this change up to the national level?" Suggestion: "By linking together and supporting each other."

"The new National Standards look at a health literacy approach at the care level (known as shared decision-making)"

"Celebrate the wins so that people see the work of Consumer Advisors"

Question: "How do you let the community know that their opinion and thinking is needed?" Suggestion: "By raising their awareness"

The challenges of feeling supported in the role

"Consumer Advisors need support and education in leadership to develop and understand their role."

"It's important to find opportunities for consumers to get involved in, depending on their level of comfort, including social activities"

"Health Issues Centre courses are expected to be funded by hospitals. Often it is difficult to find the money as there is no budget for this at hospitals. Can we look at external funding bodies to help with this, such as companies?"

Where to from here?

The following key messages that emerged throughout the conference will help inform future recommendations:

The role of the Consumer Advisor has evolved from one of *volunteer* health service user to *expert* health service user.

Different organisations are at different points of the Consumer Advisory journey depending on their leadership, maturity and development. The journey can fluctuate depending on conflicting demands within the health service.

National, state and local policy statements (such Standard 2: Partnering with Consumers) have provided guidelines for the consumer advisor process; however, further review of these policies is highly anticipated by consumers and health care services alike.

Technology would help improve access for Consumer Advisors.

Consumer Advisors can mentor, support and learn from one another, not only at an organisational level but at a broader state, federal and international level. Consumers agreed on the importance of providing the means to connect with each other, either virtually or at events like today's conference.

Consumer Advisors can work together with front-line staff to improve care.

Consumer Advisors should be considered part of the organisation and given access to email, intranet, ID badges and so forth.



Recommendations for the future

Conference delegates outlined several key recommendations that will allow Consumer Advisors to undertake their roles effectively. The Health Issues Centre also committed to responding to the key messages expressed at the conference and will work with consumers to explore the ideas below.

Health Services are encouraged to:

- introduce budgets for Consumer Advisor activities
- consider remuneration or reimbursement for Consumer Advisors
- always consider transport to and from Consumer Advisor activities
- make organisational online tools available for Consumer Advisors, where appropriate
- capture and share Consumer Advisor stories
- increase training and support for Consumer Advisors.

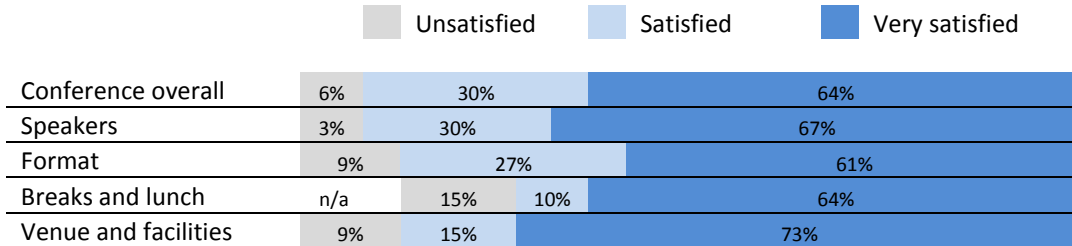
The Health Issues Centre will:

- explore good practices with Consumer Advisors themselves
- learn from different sectors about consumer participation
- explore new ways to engage consumers and the community, including online
- acknowledge the contribution of Consumer Advisors, including staff
- develop a state-wide contact list or hub for Consumer Advisors
- develop online support tools for Consumer Advisors.

About the conference

Conference evaluation

In 2015, 67 per cent of those who attended the conference completed the evaluation survey. Results from the survey (below) will help inform improvements for upcoming conferences.



Top five comments

Great day, congratulations Mercy Health

Thank you for providing this space for sharing, networking, support and hope

Great venue, good for city and rural people and people with a disability. Cheap car parking. Great to go outdoors

I've learnt so much today

It was great opportunity to network. Speakers spoke from personal health experiences

Top five ideas

Create a forum share emails, have name tags and a list of delegates

The food, lunch was a bit long. No afternoon tea

Expand the conference, make it annual, include the term 'health' and make it bigger

Talk about the term 'Consumer Advisor' and what it means to people. Collect consumer successes as 'best practice' and work on formalising best practice

Engage with consumers during hospitalisation

Consumer Advisor Conference 2017

In 2017, Mercy Health will partner with Cabrini Health's Patient, Resident and Family Experience Advisory Committee (PEAC) to host the next Consumer Advisor Conference in conjunction with the Health Issues Centre and the Department of Health and Human Services.

PEAC is comprised of patients and carers who have accessed Cabrini's services as well as members of Cabrini's management team. It is chaired by Natalie Sullivan, Executive Director at Brighton and Continuing Care who holds the Patient Experience portfolio at Cabrini. The committee was established in 2013 to advise the Chief Executive.

For more information on the Consumer Advisor Conference 2017, visit mercyhealth.com.au, healthissuescentre.org.au or cabrini.com.au



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