

## Encouraging Innovation in Consumer Participation Practice (11 May, 2016)

### Key Themes

The following provide a summary of the key themes emerging from discussing at ReGen and APSU at SHARC's [Innovation Seminar](#).

Of particular note are the implications for providers and funders of Victorian AOD treatment services and the need for immediate action to increase sector capacity to meaningfully engage consumers in service planning, delivery and review.

- Consumer Participation must be recognised as core business – It is grounded in basic human rights and should be the foundation for clinical practice: you can't provide quality services without it.
- The stakes are very high – The consequences of poor practice by service providers can be profound. A negative initial experience with treatment services can contribute to immediate harm to vulnerable individuals and families and create long-term barriers to future engagement.
- Information is power – Ensuring that consumers are aware of their rights is the starting point for participation.
- Trust is key – If consumers don't have trust that a service will listen (and respond) to their feedback, they are unlikely to engage in participation opportunities. Consumers will respond when they see service providers demonstrating their commitment to participative practice.
- Stigma is a major obstacle – The impacts of stigma have an ongoing impact in consumers' willingness to engage with treatment services and participation opportunities. Stigmatising attitudes and practice by service providers need to be named and challenged whenever and wherever they occur.
- Consumer Participation requires organisational change – Service providers need to be ready to be challenged by their consumers in order to improve the effectiveness of their services. This is likely to require changes to staff attitudes and practice, organisational systems (including performance reporting) and culture. AOD service systems are supposed to serve people affected by AOD use, not vice versa.
- Service providers need to consider staff and management capacity – It is a mistake for service providers to assume that they are able to engage in effective Consumer Participation practice. A key enabler of change is capacity building for staff and management.
- Consumer Participation needs to occur across all levels of an organisation – service providers need to demonstrate the role that consumers play in decision making within their organisations, including at a high level. Consumers' experience of participation should commence with their first contact with a service and continue throughout their use of services.
- A systemic approach is required – It takes time to build successful Consumer Participation systems. Preparation is required, along with ongoing review and redevelopment of organisational approaches. Training is necessary for staff, management and consumers.

- Consumer Participation requires resources to be sustainable – treatment providers (and funders) need to allocate resources within service models for staffing, payment for consumers' time, training etc. Without adequate resources, Consumer Participation systems will not be sustainable.
- Consumer Participation provides great Return on Investment – It improves service quality, improves practice and helps demonstrate improved treatment outcomes. It supports longer term recovery and creates capacity for consumer-led advocacy for change.