



# **Evaluation of ReGen's Consumer Participation Training**

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## **Overview**

As part of UnitingReGen's Pathways Project, a two day Consumer Participation Training was held at Jessie St Coburg on 21 and 22 August 2017. Consumer Participation is the democratic practice that includes the development of systems and policy that supports the contribution of expertise from people who use services. When set up effectively, Consumer participation can be a valuable aspect of research, policy development, education and service delivery.

As part of maintain the practice of Consumer Participation at Uniting ReGen, Consumer Participation training is offered to people who use ReGen services and wish to contribute their experiences and ideas towards service planning and delivery.

The program included the following topics:

- Relevant ReGen Policies
- Consumer Participation in the Victorian AOD sector
- Harm Reduction and Health Rights
- Consumer Participation and Self Care
- The Consumer Participant and Consumer Consultant role

## **Survey**

Ten participants indicated a willingness to be contacted via telephone to give feedback about the training. The survey was conducted between the dates 21 September – 5 October 2017. After calling each participant several times, feedback was obtained from six participants.

The survey consisted of ten scaled statements (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = unsure, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree) and seven open-ended questions.

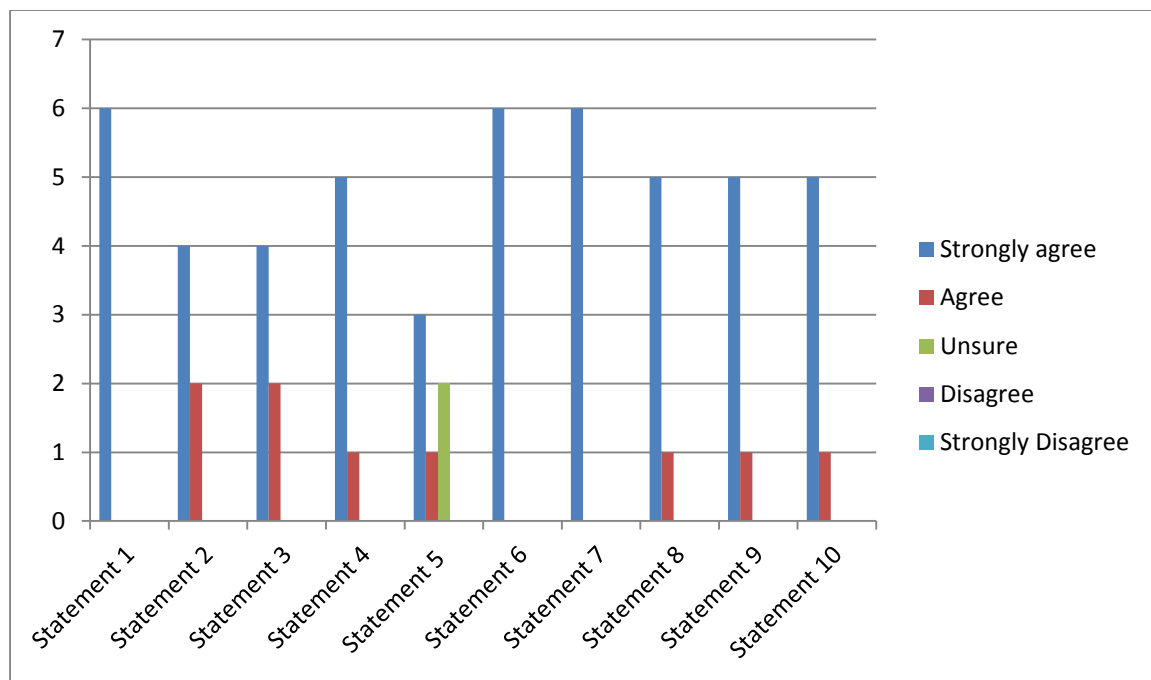
## **Scaled Statements**

1. I was able to understand how ReGen uses consumer feedback.
2. I felt like I gained a good understanding of different activities I can undertake as a consumer.
3. I obtained a good understanding of how to take care of myself when undertaking consumer participation activities.
4. I found it valuable to discuss rights and responsibilities as a consumer.
5. It was valuable to discuss issues of privacy and bullying as a consumer.
6. I found it interesting to hear about Harm Reduction Victoria and their different programs.
7. The presenter from Harm Reduction Victoria shared some interesting experiences.
8. Overall it was interesting to hear the different experiences and perspectives shared by presenters.
9. The resources provided were helpful and supported the content of the presentations.
10. The consumer participation training was worthwhile and organised well.

As can be seen from the graph below, statements 1, 6 and 7 received the highest ratings. These statements focused on Consumer Feedback and Harm Reduction. The next highest rated statements were 4, 8, 9 and 10, which focused on consumer rights and responsibilities and the training overall.

Statements 2 and 3, which focused on consumer activities and self-care, had a mixture of agreement and strong agreement. Statement 5 on privacy and bullying received the least agreement, with two participants being unsure about whether they believed it was valuable to discuss these issues or not.

### **Graph of Participant Ratings**



Statement 1 I was able to understand how ReGen uses consumer feedback.

Statement 2: felt like I gained a good understanding of different activities I can undertake as a consumer.

Statement 3: I obtained a good understanding of how to take care of myself when undertaking consumer participation activities.

Statement 4: I found it valuable to discuss rights and responsibilities as a consumer.

Statement 5: It was valuable to discuss issues of privacy and bullying as a consumer.

Statement 6: I found it interesting to hear about Harm Reduction Victoria and their different programs.

Statement 7: The presenter from Harm Reduction Victoria shared some interesting experiences.

Statement 8: Overall it was interesting to hear the different experiences and perspectives shared by presenters.

Statement 9: The resources provided were helpful and supported the content of the presentations.

Statement 10: The consumer participation training was worthwhile and organised well.

### **Open Ended Responses**

Participants were also asked a series of open ended questions related to some of the areas covered in the training.

#### ***Consumer activities***

The consumer activities that interested the participants most were:

- The ability to “give back and learn through my journey”
- “Ones that lead to job opportunities”
- Learning about dealing with other consumers and planning presentations
- Harm reduction
- Consumer Participation Policies
- Sitting in recruitment panels and board meetings.

### **Self-care**

The self-care strategies that resonated with the participants were:

- Ability to speak to a staff member at ReGen if required
- Eating properly, sleeping properly and drinking fluids
- Music, walking, yoga and meditation

One participant reflected that they wanted more “guidance on how to present my experience in a way that is looking after myself.” They wanted to have actual exercises for “monitoring what is being put out there.” This participant suggested that presenters in the future could talk about their experiences of sharing something and then feeling uncomfortable about the disclosure, and what they did to manage it.

### **Consumer rights and responsibilities**

The rights and responsibilities that were important to participants were:

- Organisation’s duty of care
- Client complaint mechanism
- Code of conduct
- Child Safety Policy
- All are important so I understand what they are

A participant valued ReGen’s respect towards lived experience and how “ReGen takes Consumer Participation seriously.” Another participant found it important to learn about how to treat other consumers with respect and dignity. Lastly, a participant stated that the most important thing about consumer rights and responsibilities was that “my point of view is valued, my experience isn’t held against me; it is actually valued. My responsibility is therefore to treat others the same way.”

### **Harm Reduction Victoria**

Participants found that learning about the following programs/activities was useful:

- Needle and Syringe Program
- Campaign for Medically Supervised Injecting Facilities
- Allowing people to use safely and with dignity

Participants spoke highly of the Harm Reduction Victoria presenter, stating that she had “the most amazing things to say and his presentation was excellent, and that it was a “good presentation.” One participant said that “He said it was her first time, and that she was nervous but he made it very interesting. Very good.”

### **Most memorable thing about the training**

Participants roundly praised the training, stating what they liked best about the training:

- “The information was great. Great source of information of things I had no idea about. I liked the statistics and information on AOD in general and how the government has broken it down into 3 different sections.”
- “I liked the whole thing. I liked that it was genuinely serious about consumer participation.”
- “I liked the consumer participant presenter, I can’t remember his name. He came in and said what he does. He is on the next stage of participation. I just liked that part of it. How he got there, what helped him and how he is helping others. I thought that was nice.”
- “Regina oversaw the whole thing very well. She was probably 50% of the entire thing. I also liked to consumer participant’s presentation.”
- “I am studying social work so understanding the broader model of drug and alcohol services in Australia, state and federal funding interests me.”

### **Suggestions for improvement**

A couple of people mentioned that they wished the Aboriginal presenter was able to attend. Another participant suggested that an after-hours training would be helpful. Another suggestion was to have even more speakers, "different speakers are good because you hear different perspectives."

### **Areas for further exploration**

When asked whether there are aspects of the training they would have liked to have explored more, participants said:

- More options and ways to become a consumer participant and consultant.
- Organisational policies
- A bit more of the practical, what I would say if I get called up as a participant.
- Learning about speaking about my experience.
- Harm Reduction Victoria
- How to present your story and how to facilitate a group.

### **Strengths and Limitations of the Evaluation**

All respondents in the survey were enthusiastic and generous when providing feedback. The mixture of closed scale/rating questions as well as open-ended questions gave them an opportunity to consider and reflect on their experiences at the Consumer Participation Training.

A good rapport was established with each of the respondents, which helped create a comfortable space to discuss their experiences of the training.

The limitations of this evaluation process are as follows:

- Small sample size: Ten participants originally agree to provide feedback. However, after attempting to call participants, only six completed the evaluation.
- Time lapse and recall: The evaluation was conducted one month after the training. While the participants adequately recalled how they felt about the training in general, there was some difficulty remembering precise details. A couple of clients also seemed to be conflating the ReGen training with other trainings they had attended.
- The evaluation was conducted by a person who did not attend the training. This led to some limitation in assisting the respondents with their memory.
- A couple of the participants expressed interest in obtaining a position as a consumer consultant or getting work at ReGen. This may have affected their willingness to provide candid critical feedback.

These limitations may be addressed through a consideration of the following:

- The evaluation survey could be prepared and finalised prior to the Consumer Participation Training so that the survey can be conducted soon after its conclusion.
- The evaluation could be conducted by someone who attended the training, enabling them to prompt participants about specific aspects of the training and engage more effectively when exploring the open-ended questions. (On the other hand, by not attending the training, the evaluator was in an objective position to conduct the survey. Respondents may also have felt more at ease giving feedback to a neutral person.)
- At the beginning of the training, participants could be encouraged to take brief notes and reflect on their positive or negative experiences as well as their thoughts and ideas so they can use these to refer to when the evaluation is conducted.
- At the beginning of the survey, a brief script could be included emphasising that candid and critical reflection is welcomed as it will help improve training and does not have an impact on their ability to become consumer consultants in the future. (However, it should be noted that the shortage of critical feedback may simply be an accurate reflection of this training program.)

**Conclusion**

The respondents were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences at the ReGen Consumer Participation Training, with one stating, "I can't fault it – very professional and understanding, and another "Well done, Regina is really good at what she does. It was a good experience."