

Consumer

Participation

Position Statement

This UnitingCare ReGen (ReGen) Position Statement provides evidence-based recommendations for the continued expansion of consumer participation initiatives within alcohol and/or other drugs (AOD) services in Australia.

Introduction

The concept of consumer participation in health organisations is not a new one. In their [1978 Declaration of Alma-Ata](#), the World Health Organisation declared that 'people have the right and duty to participate individually and collectively in the planning and implementation of their health care' (WHO, 1978). While there are a variety of understandings of what 'participation' in health services looks like, the following provides a good generic definition:

The process of involving health consumers in decision making about health service planning, policy development, priority setting and quality in the delivery of health services.
(Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, 1998)

There are several terms used to describe those who participate. The Association of Participating Service Users (Clarke & Brindle, 2010) list the following definitions:

Consumer: Someone who uses, has used, or is eligible to use alcohol and other drug services. This term also includes the family, friends and significant others of those who are eligible to use AOD services, as well as other people affected by AOD policy and laws, whether or not they directly access these services themselves;

Service User: A person who uses or has used AOD services;

Client: A person who has used a particular AOD service.

Much of the research in this area uses the all-encompassing term 'consumer participation', also referred to as 'Community Participation' or 'Citizen Participation', and so this will be the preferred term used in this document.

ReGen believes that:

- Consumers have a basic human right to be involved in the decisions regarding their AOD treatment;
- Meaningful participation from consumers is necessary for AOD agencies to deliver the best service possible;
- Organisations benefit from consumer participation. It ensures that services are relevant to their consumers;
- Consumers should also benefit from being involved in the participation process.

Rationale

Consumer participation in health is an essential principle of health development, clinical governance, community capacity building and the development of social capital, as well as being an important democratic right (Victorian Government, 2011). There is a growing body of evidence about the benefits of consumer participation, not only for the consumer, but for the organisation and the wider community. These benefits include:

- Gains in self-confidence and empowerment for participants (AVIL, 2011)
- Improvements in the quality of health care (Clarke & Brindle, 2010)
- Improvement in health outcomes for the consumer (Rance & Treloar, 2015)
- Increased progression to education, training and employment (Hinton, 2010)

The AOD sector reforms by the Victorian Government were intended to lay foundation for enhancing consumer participation activities within treatment organisations (Victorian Government, 2011), and the supporting workforce framework also recognises consumer participation as integral to recovery-orientated practice changes in service delivery (Victorian Government, 2012). The *National Alcohol and Other Drug Workforce Development Strategy* has listed 'improving consumer participation in AOD service provision, policy and planning' as one its key outcome areas (Intergovernmental Committee on Drugs, 2014), and the *National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards* (2012) listed Consumer participation in its first standard ('Governance for Safety and Quality in Health Service Organisations'), with its second standard being 'Partnering with Consumers' (Australian Commission on Safety & Quality in Health Care, 2012).

ReGen recommends that:

- The Victorian Government continues to advocate for consumer participation in AOD services;
- The Victorian Government makes funding available to directly embed consumer participation within AOD organisations;
- Peak and peer-led organisations receive substantial ongoing support to expand the evidence base for consumer participation;
- Service providers within the AOD sector work together in a supportive culture of change to enable each to improve its systems for consumer participation;
- That consumer participation is embedded in AOD sector workforce development initiatives.

ReGen resolves to:

- Continually increase its capacity to enhance consumer participation;
- Develop sustainable models of consumer participation within the organisation;
- Support and lead initiatives that promote a culture that supports consumer participation practice;
- Report to its consumers (and other stakeholders) on its progress.

Further Reading

Accompanying Supporting Evidence is available on our [website](#)

References

- Australian Commission on Safety & Quality in Health Care (2012) *National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards*, Sydney, Australia
- Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League (2011) *Treatment Service Users Project: Phase Two Final Report*, Canberra, Australia
- Clarke, M, Brindle, R. (2010), *Straight from the Source: A practical guide to consumer participation in the Victorian alcohol and other drug sector*, Carnegie, Victoria
- Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care (1998) *Consumer Focus Collaboration* Canberra, Australia
- Hinton, T. (2010) *Voices on choices: Working towards consumer-led alcohol and drug treatment*, Hobart, Australia: The Social Action and Research Centre, Anglicare Tasmania
- Intergovernmental Committee on Drugs (2014) *National Alcohol and Other Drug Workforce Development Strategy*, Canberra, Australia
- Rance, J & Treloar, C. (2015) "We are people too": Consumer participation and the potential transformation of therapeutic relations within drug treatment, In: International Journal of Drug Policy; 26(1): 30-36
- Victorian Government (2012) *Victoria's alcohol and drug workforce framework: Strategic directions 2012 – 22*, Melbourne, Australia
- Victorian Government (2011) *Doing it with us not for us: Strategic direction 2010-13*, Melbourne, Australia
- World Health Organisation (n.d.) *Declaration of Alma-Ata*. [Online] Available from: http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/113877/E93944.pdf [Accessed 18th January 2013]

Disclaimer

This Position Statement is a general guide designed to provide information to assist decision-making and is based on the best evidence available at the time of publication. While every care has been taken in preparing this document, ReGen and our stakeholders, do not warrant, expressly or impliedly, or assume any legal liability or responsibility for, the accuracy, completeness, or usefulness of any information or process contained in this publication.

Authorised: CEO ReGen

Date of adoption: June 2017

Date to be reviewed: June 2019

About ReGen

Our purpose is to promote health and reduce alcohol and other drug related harm.

ReGen is the lead Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) treatment and education agency of UnitingCare Victoria and Tasmania. ReGen is a not-for-profit agency, which has over 45 years' experience delivering a comprehensive range of AOD treatment and education services to the community.

These services include Counselling and Support, Assessment and Intake, Community Outpatient, Home-based and Residential Withdrawal for adults and youth, Supported Accommodation, Drug Diversion programs, Youth and Family Services, an Intensive Playgroup, Alcohol Community Rehabilitation Program and AOD services at Port Phillip Prison. ReGen also delivers Education and Training programs nationally.

UnitingCare ReGen, 26 Jessie St, Coburg, VIC 3058 Australia

Tel: +61 (0)3 9386 2876 Fax: +61 (0)3 9383 6705

Email: contact@regen.org.au **Website:** www.regen.org.au



<http://twitter.com/ReGenUC>



www.facebook.com/ReGenUC



www.youtube.com/user/ReGenUC



www.linkedin.com/company/UnitingCare-ReGen



www.regen.org.au/scoopit



UnitingCare ReGen
Formerly UnitingCare Moreland Hall

