

The Health Consumers' Council is an independent community based organisation, representing the consumers' 'voice' in health policy, planning, research and service delivery.

The Council advocates on behalf of consumers to government, doctors, other health professionals, hospitals and the wider health system.

Our Mission

To promote quality health services in Western Australia.

Aim

The Health Consumers' Council shall ensure that health consumers contribute to the development of health policy, planning, research and service delivery.

Principles

The principles that inform the work of the Health Consumers' Council are those of confidentiality, consultation, social justice, anti-discrimination, access and equity, and the empowerment of health consumers. The Health Consumers' Council promotes a social model of health and accessible consultation.

The Health Consumers' Council requires that all health services be delivered in a professional and ethical manner, free from any form of discrimination and/or harassment. Appropriate grievance procedures will be developed to deal with any breach.

Objectives

The Health Consumers' Council's objectives are:

1. To educate consumers about health issues and the health system in WA to assist them to obtain health care most appropriate to their needs.
2. To provide an advocacy service for any consumer or group of consumers experiencing problems with the health system, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds who may experience difficulties accessing health services.
3. To provide training and support to consumers to enable them to initiate changes in the health system for the benefit of all members of the community.
4. To provide an information service to consumers and groups of consumers to enable them to develop the consumer perspective on health issues.
5. To maximise consumer participation in decision making in the health system of Western Australia.

Outcomes

- To increase health consumer and provider knowledge of consumer rights and responsibilities.
- To develop a partnership approach between doctors and patients for more effective health care.
- To facilitate the development of consumer oriented health care, policy, planning and practice.

Board Members

Karen Carey Hazell	<i>Chairperson</i>
Janet Lowe	<i>Deputy Chair</i>
Tim Benson	<i>Deputy Chair</i>
Ashok Desai	<i>Treasurer</i>
Hope Alexander	<i>Individual</i>
Roy Dobson	<i>Individual</i>
Fran England	<i>Individual</i>
Ginger Gordy	<i>Individual</i>
Anne McKenzie	<i>Individual</i>
Lois Johnston	<i>Individual</i>
Jon Kaub	<i>Individual</i>

Staff

Michele Kosky <i>Executive Director</i>
Maxine Drake <i>Senior Advocate</i>
Andrea Callaghan <i>Advocate</i>
Ricki Knoetze <i>Advocate</i>
Matthew Hunt <i>Consumer Representative Training and Rural Consumer Participation Project Officer</i>
Kathie McLure <i>Consumer Representative Training and Rural Consumer Participation Project Officer</i>
Rosemary Caithness <i>Office Manager</i>
Kath Mazzella <i>Casual (Admin Assistant)</i>
Karen Fernandez <i>Casual (Admin Assistant)</i>
Bruce Ambrosius <i>Co-ordinator - Consumer Consultant Trial</i>

Lyn Mahboub

Project Officer - Consumer Consultant Trial

Lorraine Powell

Casual Project Officer- Consumer Consultant Trial

Harriet Sawyer

Casual Project Officer- Consumer Consultant Trial

A Snapshot of the Year

- 11 public forums were held
- 1157 consumers obtained information, referral and advice
- 120 consumer representatives are currently placed on decision-making bodies
- 362 consumers are listed on the Health Consumers' Council database, ready and willing to participate in health policy and planning
- The Health Issues Group has 13 active members and addressed 26 health issues
- 21 consumer perspective submissions on health policy were prepared and submitted
- 3346 brochures were distributed throughout Western Australia
- 477 health consumers were assisted with complex health complaints
- 11 small consumer research projects were contributed to or undertaken by the Health Consumers' Council
- Health Consumers' Council spokespersons made a number of media comments over the last year; radio 24 times, print media 25 times and television 31 times
- The Health Consumers' Council produced and printed five issues and

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distributed 2482 copies of Health Matters.

Chairperson's Report

The participation of health consumers is being recognized by governments and service planners as an effective tool in the design, development and monitoring of health services, and as a result Health Consumers' Council has experienced a strong demand for our services.

At the same time demand for advocacy on behalf of patients is also increasing with the increased benefit (and work burden) of ensuring that systemic problems identified in advocacy feed back into the healthcare system to create a continuous quality improvement loop.

Health Consumers' Council is an organisation that runs on a small amount of government funding and a large amount of passion and dedication of the staff and volunteers. The Contract Report for the Department of Health demonstrates the large volume of important work that is conducted by the Council.

WA leads the nation and Australia leads the world in health consumer participation. Currently WA is experiencing a period of significant change in the provision of health services under the Health Reform agenda, which provides us with the potential to make real and sustained improvements in the system. Michele Kosky has been very active in ensuring that the consumer voice contributes to

the planning process. On the advocacy side Michele is well assisted by Maxine Drake who is also highly respected in the national and international arena.

One of Health Consumers' Council great strengths is the dedication and skill of our large volunteer network. In the past year Health Consumers' Council consumer representatives were appointed to more than 120 committees, positions filled largely by volunteers, who willingly give up their time to contribute to improving the health care system.

Our Consumer Representative Training has been very successful in providing high quality consumer representatives many of whom are recognized as being the most effective across Australia.

One of the projects under current development is the Consumer Participation Policy, which if adopted by the government, will ensure consumer participation on all committees dealing with health policy development and service planning, implementation and monitoring.

The Council operated in accordance with the Strategic Business Plan and looks forward to a year of continued strong representation of the consumer voice in health.

Karen Carey Hazell
Chairperson

Executive Director's Report

It only seems like yesterday that the 2004 Annual Report was being prepared and now it is September 2005. The Health Consumers' Council has been busy and effective over the past 12 months. Some highlights in the year include Health Consumers' Council advocacy at the State Administrative Tribunal, a Roundtable for Lay members of Hospital Human Research Ethics Committees, a presentation to the UN/Queensland Government Conference Engaging Communities, wide ranging presentations to National Seniors, and the CAC Chairs Roundtable.

We continue to participate in the NGO Industry Plan project, and have signed a Partnership agreement with the WA government as part of the NGO reform process. We wrote in the agreement *'The Health Consumers' Council welcomes the Industry Plan as a framework for a robust and health relationship between government and the community sector.'*

A good relationship enables remarkable things to be achieved for people in need of services and assistance in Western Australia.'

We farewell Karen Carey Hazell as Health Consumers' Council Chairperson after two years extraordinary hard work. In the fine tradition of previous Health Consumers' Council Chairs:

Ann White

Mitch Messer

Margot Boetcher

Karen Carey Hazell has made an outstanding contribution to consumer advocacy and consumer participation in Western Australia. On behalf of all Health Consumers' Council staff, thank you Karen for your fine work, excellent advice and strong support.

This is also an opportunity to publicly thank Bruce Ambrosius and Lyn Mahboub for their ground breaking work in the Mental Health Consumer Consultant Trial. The Trial will regrettably cease operation on 30 September, 2005 but the thoughtful and innovative Recommendations Report from the Trial is available on our website www.hcc-wa.global.net.au It is hoped that the Report will become the guidebook to consumer initiated reform in WA mental health. We wish Bruce and Lyn all the very best and hope they maintain strong links with Health Consumers' Council.

To all staff at Health Consumers' Council past and present, Kathie, Andrea, Ricki, Rosemary and Maxine thank you for your marvellous work over the past 12 months.

To people in the Health Reform Taskforce and the Department of Health, people in the WA media and Health Consumers' Council members, thank you for your contribution in improving patient care and consumer participation. To all members of Health Consumers' Council Board thank you for your guidance and integrity in the past 12 months.

Michele Kosky
Executive Director

Objective 1

Enhancing Community Understanding of Health Issues

1.1 Brochures/Pamphlets

Brochures produced by the Health Consumers' Council that promote consumer rights.

The Council distributed the following brochures:

- *A Guide to Your Rights - Patients of Psychiatrists*
- *Cerebral Palsy*
- *Consent to Medical Treatment - Your Rights*
- *Questions to Ask Your Doctor*
- *Health Consumers' Council Brochure*
- *Older Health Consumers' Statement of Rights*
- *Your Discharge from Hospital*
- *Making a Complaint*
- *Consumer Training Kits*
- *10 Tips for Safer Health Care*
- *Consumers and Dental Services*
- *Some things you might like to know about the WA health system.*

The Council produced and distributed A Guide to Your Rights, Consent to Medical Treatment and Questions to Ask Your Doctor in five community languages being Arabic, Bosnian, Farsi, Indonesian and Somali. Further information on the number of pamphlets and brochures

distributed by the Council is included under Objective 4 (see page 10).

1.2 Health Consumer forums

Forums on health issues that are relevant and of interest to health consumers in metropolitan and rural areas are held. The forums also represent a unique opportunity for community consultation on health issues.

Eleven forums were held in the last 12 months in the metropolitan area on the following topics:

- *Ethics Committee Roundtable for Lay Members*
- *Roundtable for Non-Government Not-for-Profit Health Sector*
- *Post Mortems*
- *Open Disclosure Roundtable*
- *Review of National Statement on Ethical Conduct on Research of Human Beings*
- *National Regulation of Embryo Research forum*
- *Information Session on eHealth*
- *Palliative Care Roundtable*
- *Health Reform - Roundtable for Bentley and Osborne Park Hospitals Consumer Advisory Council Chairpersons*
- *Medical Power of Attorney/Advance Directives/Living Wills*
- *Consumer Advisory Council Chairpersons Roundtables.*

1.3 Education Program

The Council organised and/or contributed to 40 education/community development sessions on health consumer issues.

1.4 Health Information and Referral Service

This service which includes a toll free 1800 number for people from rural and remote areas of Western Australia provides statewide information and referral regarding the health care system. It also represents a mechanism for gathering feedback about the health system from the consumers' point of view.

The Council provided information, referral and advice to 1157 consumers through this service.

1.5 Newsletters

The Council's newsletter called 'Health Matters' provides information on current health issues of concern to consumers and keeps people up to date with the Council's activities and changes to the health system in Western Australia.

The Council produced 4 issues, totalling 2482 copies of Health Matters over the last 12 months.

Objective 2

Maximising Community Participation in Health Service Decision-making.

2.1 Consumer Representatives on Committees

The Council promotes/recruits consumer representatives who provide a consumer perspective on various government and non-government committees, working parties, and boards.

The Council has consumer representatives on 120 decision-making bodies. The decision-making bodies at 30 June 2005 are listed on page 12.

2.2 Consumer Representative Training and Support

The Council provides training, briefing and support to consumer representatives on boards. All consumer representatives on committees for the Health Consumers' Council are eligible to receive training, support and information.

Two consumer representative training courses were run in the past 12 months and 18 people participated. The Council was pleased to work closely with the Cancer Foundation and Diabetes WA in running these training courses.

2.3 Database of Consumers

The Council maintains a database of consumers with health expertise who are willing and able to participate in health policy and planning activities.

The Council has 362 health consumer representatives on the database available for participation on health care decision-making bodies. This data is referred to on a daily basis.

2.4 Mentoring

The Council conducts a mentoring programme with community organisations, agencies and self help groups, assisting them to develop skills and ensure larger agencies are sensitive to consumer needs, thus maximising the full potential of both.

The Council provided mentoring on 13 occasions to organisations including self-help groups and non-government agencies.

2.5 Rural Consumer Issues

In this period the Council has contributed to training and discussions with Local District Health Advisory Councils (DHAC) by video conference and in person. In addition, the Health Consumers' Council assisted in the development and implementation of a DHAC Chairpersons Conference. The DHAC are located in the following regions: Wheatbelt; Murchison/Midwest; Pilbara/Gascoyne; Great Southern, South East Coastal; Goldfields and Kimberley.

2.6 Health Issues Group

This is an on-going committee of members from the Council who meet to discuss and make recommendations on consumer issues that are brought to the attention of the Council.

The Health Issues Group has 13 active members and addressed the following health issues over the last 12 months:

- *Radiology Department at RPH*
- *Social workers providing medical reports*
- *Role of the Public Trustee*
- *Seniors Week and promotion of health rights*
- *School Dinners: the UK Experience*
- *Consumers and eHealth*
- *Multiple Chemical Sensitivity Rally*
- *Policy of retention of imaging documents*
- *Review of Consumer Participation in the Health Promotion Directorate*
- *Quality of aged care*

- *Office of Health Review review 2004*
- *Termination of pregnancy - late term abortion*
- *Health Promotion Directorate*
- *Genetically Modified Organisms*
- *Treatment of people with mental illness*
- *WACHS Patient Transport Review*
- *Safety and Quality of healthcare in Australia*
- *Pharmacies and emergency contraception*
- *Open Disclosure Standards project*
- *Central Waitlist and waiting lists for orthopaedic surgery and joint replacement*
- *Power subsidy*
- *Cutting back IVF funding*
- *Waiting time at KEMH*
- *Stay On Your Feet Program*
- *Safe Working Hours for doctors*
- *Medical assessments for children in care.*

2.7 Membership

Current membership in Health Consumers' Council is:

- Individuals 362
- Associations 51
- Organisations 124

2.8 Consultation

The Council provides consumer consultation on health issues.

The Health Consumers' Council participated in 74 meetings and made 22 written submissions to government and non-government agencies, hospitals and other organisations.

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2.9 Enhancement of Working Groups

The Council maintained the following Working Groups:

- *Esperance Health Issues Group*
- *Consumer Participation Policy Working Group*
- *Mental Health Consumer Consultant Advisory Group.*

Objective 3

Strengthening the Accountability of the Health Care System

3.1 Complaint Handling Agencies

The Council assisted the Health Complaints Network WA with:

- *Improving the IT component of complaints handling*
- *Rolling out the Complaints Policy to country health services.*

3.2 Health Consumers' Council Initiatives

Issues promoted by the Council in relation to health service policy:

- *Concern about funding new RPH units which are at odds with the Reid Report*
- *Requested an audit of services available for Aboriginal people in the metropolitan hospital system*
- *Offered Office of Safety and Quality Health Consumers' Council assistance to develop and draft a Statewide Consumer Participation policy*
- *Health Consumers' Council and Community Legal Centre Association discussed the proposal for Independent Advocacy Agency to*

Assist People with the Department of Community Development

- *Mental Health Review Board's reliance on a medical officer's work when considering a person's involuntary status.*
- *Re-establishment of the Centre for Mental Health Services research*
- *Amendment to the Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2004*
- *Dental Health Services requesting reasons for dental waiting lists*
- *Feedback to Office of Health Review about concerns raised by consumers*
- *Legal Aid WA website under the heading of **Information About the Law/Making a Complaint***
- *Determine ways to improve communication between medical practitioners and consumers by reviewing the current UWA School of Medicine curriculum*
- *Ethical issues surrounding human research*
- *Requested changing the name of spectacle subsidy to lens subsidy*
- *Requested guidelines regarding freely available and plentiful supply of water to patrons*
- *Consent requirements in the **Human Reproductive Technology Act 1991***
- *Petition to the Legislative Council regarding provision of unrestricted travel passes to disabled voluntary community workers*
- *Contacted Social Policy, Premier and Cabinet regarding lack of funding of pensioner ambulance services*
- *Policy regarding no access to fertility treatment for homosexual women and commitment to a non-discriminatory*

- approach to access to fertility services*
- *Position of Director of the Office of Health Review*
 - *DOCEP review of the Fair Trading/Consumer Affairs Acts to include 'consumers rights'*
 - *Suggested to Health Reform that current Consumer Advisory Council Chairpersons become members of the new Area Community Advisory Councils*
 - *Requested there be a change to the law that dental xrays belong to the dental provider and any copies cost \$20*
 - *Improved the management of mental health patients at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital*
 - *Improved the process whereby mothers with young children having to queue to see a specialist and for prescriptions*
 - *Proposed changes to arrangements for the Birth Defects Registry*
 - *Suggested that the management of complex mental health cases be included in the Mental Health Action Plan 2005 -2010*
 - *Requested that the OHR be directed to carry out an investigation under section 45 of the **Health Services Act 1995***
 - *Supported the future progress of the Western Australian Audit of Surgical Mortality implementation*
 - *Requested that the Public Trustee gives people with a mental illness the option of being financially independent*
 - *Requested the development of a discussion paper on consumer rights and having legislation enacted titled **Consumer Rights Recognition Act***

- *Queried what employment policies are in place to check overseas doctors' qualifications, experience and registration*
- *Suggested that the Coroner's Court reduce the time taken to investigate the cause of death and where it is beneficial, advise the community of the findings*
- *Instigated the implementation of changes at Joondalup Hospital as a result of consumer complaints received by Health Consumers' Council.*

3.3 Individual Consumer Advocacy

The Council assists individuals with difficulties and problems with the health system and health care providers.

The Council assisted 477 health consumers with complex complaints and advocated on their behalf.

3.4 Public Comment

Contributions to the media increase consumers' knowledge of health issues and the health system.

The Council contributed to print media discussion 25 times, contributed to radio discussion/comment on health matters 24 times, and contributed to television coverage of health matters 31 times.

Objective 4

Maximising the Information Base on Health Consumer Issues

4.1 Networks

Networks with local, national and international consumer organisations assist the Council in information sharing, programme ideas and policy development.

The Council has maintained networks with the following organisations:

- *Practicum Limited - Toronto*
- *State Administrative Tribunal*
- *Curtin University*
- *Cancer Council WA*
- *WA Council of Social Services*
- *Western Institute of Self Help*
- *Consumers' Association (WA)*
- *WA Association for Mental Health*
- *Divisions of WA*
- *Consumers' Health Forum*
- *Health Issues Centre (VIC)*
- *Rural and Remote Consumers Network*
- *Health Consumers of Rural and Remote Australia*
- *Patients Rights Advocacy (Waikato, New Zealand).*

4.2 Policy Information Provided

The Council's library is a resource for the community providing information on health consumer issues.

The Council assisted consumers a number of times with various health information, including both print and electronic information.

The following number of pamphlets were distributed by the Council:

- *A Guide to Your Rights - Patients of Psychiatrists* 246
- *Cerebral Palsy (being reprinted)* 112
- *Consent to Medical Treatment - Your Rights* 677
- *Questions to Ask Your Doctor* 675
- *Health Consumers' Council Brochure* 299
- *Older Health Consumers' Statement of Rights* 313
- *Your Discharge from Hospital* 353
- *Making a Complaint* 310
- *Consumers and Dental Services* 108
- *Consumer Training Kits* 2
- *10 Tips for Safer Health Care* 151

4.4 Research

The Council undertakes small research projects on consumer issues. It also promotes and encourages consumer research by other government and non-government agencies.

The Council undertook and/or contributed to 11 small research projects.

4.5 Health Consumers' Council Website Access

The World Wide Website had an average of 94 visitors per day and is updated regularly. The address of the website is www.hcc-wa.global.net.au

Consumer Representatives

The Health Consumers' Council has representatives on the following committees, Boards and working parties:

- *Advisory Committee to the Head of the School of Dentistry*
- *Advisory Committee of Primary Health Care Research, Evaluation and Development Unit*
- *Advisory Group Research Project: Involving Council of Official Visitors; Mental Health Law Centre; and Mental Health Review Board*
- *Advocare*
- *Australian Health Ethics Council: Post Coma Unresponsiveness Working Party*
- *Australian Cochrane Centre Review Group Selection Group*
- *Australian Cochrane Centre Steering Group*
- *Australian Council of Health Care Standards Performance Indicators*
- *Australian Divisions of General Practice National Division Forum Steering Committee*
- *Australian Medical Council: Recognition of Medical Specialties Advisory Committee*
- *Australian Office of Safety and Quality Measurement for Improvement Group*
- *Australian Office of Safety and Quality Consumer Reference Network*
- *Australian Safety and Quality Council - Adverse Medicine Events Line National Steering Committee*
- *Bentley Health Service Community Advisory Council*
- *Bioethics and Genetic*

Epidemiology Committee

- *Confidentiality of Health Information Committee*
- *Child Development Service Management Group: NMHS Population Health*
- *Clinical Governance Project Steering Committee*
- *Cochrane Collaboration Consumer Network*
- *Community Board of Advice of Joondalup Health Campus*
- *Community Quality Use of Medicines National Prescribing Service*
- *Community Quality Use of Medicines Steering Committee*
- *Consumer Health Forum Governing Committee*
- *Consumer Reference Group Breast Screen*
- *Curtin University Nursing Advisory Committee*
- *Diabetes Association of WA Consumer Reference Group*
- *Dental Board of WA*
- *Dental Health Services Community Advisory Council*
- *Dental Registration Board*
- *Department of Health and Ageing Informed Financial Consent Working Group*
- *Department of Health WA Review Panel - Mail Opening policy*
- *Department of Health and Ageing - Expert Group Clinical Aged Care*
- *Department of Health and Ageing - Health Connect Evaluation Advisory Group*
- *Department of Health and Ageing Informed Financial Consent National Taskforce Overarching Committee*
- *Department of Health WA Complaints Co-ordinators*

Committee

- *Department of Health WA - Consumer Participation Policy Working Group*
- *Deputy-Reproductive Technology Council*
- *Electro Convulsive Therapy Working Committee*
- *Edith Cowan University Nursing Consultative Committee*
- *eHealth Steering Committee*
- *Enhanced Divisional Quality Use of Medicines*
- *North Metro Health Region: Falls Demonstration Project*
- *Feasibility Study Intra-operative Radiotherapy for Grade 1-2 Breast Cancer*
- *Freemason's Research into Aged Care*
- *Genetic Support Council Board*
- *Genetics Advisory Committee Department of Health WA*
- *General Practice Hospital Integration Project*
- *Health Advisory Consumer Council*
- *Heart Stroke and Vascular Health Strategies Group*
- *Hepatitis Council of WA*
- *Human Research Ethics Committee - Curtin University*
- *Interim Industry Council for Non-Government Sector*
- *Joanna Briggs Institute Consumer Information Program Advisory Group*
- *Joanna Briggs Institute for Evidence Based Nursing*
- *King Edward Memorial Hospital Community Advisory Council*
- *Lens Prosthesis Clinical Advisory Group*
- *Lifestyle Prescription Reference Group*
- *Medical Board of WA*
- *Medical Services Advisory Services International Normalising Ratio Expert Committee*
- *Melanoma Advisory Service Management Board*
- *Midwife Project Advisory Committee*
- *Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention Information and Resource Working Group*
- *Multiple Chemical Sensitivity Taskforce*
- *National Health and Medical Research Council*
- *National Health Priority Advisory Council*
- *National Pathology Accreditation Advisory Council*
- *National Prescribing Service Curriculum and Training Working Group*
- *National Prescribing Service Interventions Working Group*
- *National Service Improvement Framework for Heart, Circulatory and Vascular Health*
- *North Metropolitan Health Service (NMHS) Population Health Working Group*
- *North Metro Regional Diabetes Steering Committee*
- *Nurses Board - Education for the Future*
- *Nurses Board Network Advisory Panel*
- *Nurses Professional Practice Board*
- *Nursing Board of WA Education Reference Committee*
- *Occupational Therapy Australia WA Education Advisory Committee*
- *Office of Mental: Health Community Advisory Body*

- *Opiate Replacement Pharmacotherapy Advocacy and Complaints Service*
- *Opioid Pharmacotherapies Professional Review Group*
- *Orthopaedic Prosthesis Clinical Advisory Group*
- *Osborne Park Community Advisory Council*
- *Osborne Park Division of General Practice*
- *Osteopaths Board*
- *Palliative Care Edith Cowan University - Systemic Review of Bereavement Literature*
- *Pathways Home Technical Reference Group*
- *Pharmacy Guild: Dispensing and Monitoring S8 and S4 Drugs*
- *Pharmacy Guild Expert Advisory Group - Change Management in Community Pharmacy*
- *Policy Advisory Committee for Prostheses and Devices*
- *Primary Health Summit Reference Group*
- *Prostheses Clinical Advisory Group: Hip and Knee Accessories*
- *Prostheses Clinical Advisory Group: Trauma*
- *Prosthesis and Devices Committee*
- *Review Committee of Effectiveness of Pelvic Floor Muscle Program*
- *Royal Perth Hospital Animal Ethics Committee*
- *Rural Private Access Program WA Reference Group*
- *Silver Chain Ethics Committee - Female lay member*
- *Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital Community Advisory Council*
- *St John of God Subiaco: Patient Quality Care Committee*
- *UWA Department of General*

- Practitioners: Primary Health Care Research, Evaluation and Development Advisory Committee*
- *UWA Medical and Dental Faculty Advisory Board*
 - *WA Aged Care Advisory Council*
 - *WA Association of Mental Health Board*
 - *WA Community Care Reform Advisory Group*
 - *WA Council on Safety and Quality in Healthcare*
 - *WA Department of Health Office of Safety and Quality Clinical Advisory Group*
 - *WA Drug Evaluation Panel*
 - *WA Medication Safety Group*
 - *WA Reproductive Technology Council*
 - *WA Research Tissue Network*
 - *WA Sexually Transmissible Diseases Committee.*

Mental Health Consumer Consultant Trial

The Consumer Consultant Trial is an outcome of the election promise funding committed by the current government before winning office in 2000. The commitment was for \$420,000 over four years and the Trial is the first phase of the allocation of these funds. The objective to be met through these funds was stated as Mental Health Consumer Advocacy.

The Trial evolved out of existing work in the community sector to promote consumer participation in decision-making settings in mental health. Consumer participation models elsewhere in Australia and overseas

suggested that a sustainable approach to consumer participation in service reform may be achieved through the appointment of Consumer Consultants in mental health services.

The Health Consumers' Council was contracted to run the Consumer Consultant Trial, building on a previous program called the Mental Health Consumer Advocacy Program. An Advisory Committee provided oversight for the Trial, project management was the responsibility of the Health Consumers' Council and day-to-day operational issues were managed locally by the selected mental health service.

Mental health services exist to provide services to mental health consumers but the policies of these services are not developed with input from the consumers who will receive the services. It might seem self-evident that policies are meeting the needs of the people that they will effect, but this assumption cannot be relied upon. Continuing consumer dissatisfaction with mental health services has been the driving force behind this Trial in the interest of producing meaningful reform of mental health services.

The Consumer Consultant Trial project sought to systematically consult consumers about the services they receive, match the issues raised with the relevant policy area then suggest changes accordingly.

The result of the consultation process, literature review and careful deliberation is the Consumer Consultant Trial Recommendations Report. Many thanks to Bruce Ambrosius, Lyn

Mahboub, Harriet Sawyer and Lorraine Powell for this outstanding and unique document. It is available at www.hcc-wa.global.net.au.

The Health Consumers' Council strongly supports the development of an Action Plan which would ensure the provision of consumer-centred services, equitable access to services and improved opportunity for participation by mental health consumers.

Website

From July 2004 - June 2005 the Health Consumers' Council Website has attracted over 29,637 hits. The presentation of and new links to the website are updated every six months. Information is uploaded when it becomes available between those dates. Comments on the website are always most welcome and we urge health consumers to utilise this service.

The address is www.hcc-wa.global.net.au

*For additional copies of the Health Consumers' Council
Annual Report please contact the Council on (08) 9221
3422*



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