

Consumer participation in health and community organisations in Melbourne's west

Summary report, January 2017

About the report

HealthWest Partnership brings together 48 health care providers, community organisations and local government members in Melbourne's west. This report explores how consumer participation is being used by member organisations to facilitate consumer input into organisational planning and decision making. It identifies resources and support that organisations need to further build their consumer participation work.

'Participation occurs when consumers, carers and community members are meaningfully involved in decision making about health policy and planning, care and treatment, and the wellbeing of themselves and the community.'

(Doing it with us not for us: Strategic direction 2010-13, Victorian Government Department of Health & Human Services, 2011)

Survey results

A consumer participation survey was sent to 45 HealthWest members. 13 members participated with 12 surveys completed and one partly completed. Responses came from a wide range of member organisations representing different sectors including hospitals, community health, mental health, local government and peak bodies.

Survey results were compiled and a series of four key findings and two recommendations developed.

Key finding #1: There is a need for guidance and support to encourage organisations to incorporate consumer participation into high level decision making.

Consumer participation is a priority at the majority of participating organisations. However, this is not always reflected in high level decisions being made at these organisations.

Consumers have limited opportunities to have input into high-level decisions. Organisations tend to include consumers in these activities less often (e.g. governance, infrastructure planning and critical incident review processes) or less effectively (e.g. policy input and priority setting).

Is consumer input reflected in high level decisions in your organisation? (No. orgs)



Key finding #2: Developing mechanisms to enable organisations to share and learn from each other will allow organisations to tap into a high degree of expertise and build their capacity in all aspects of consumer participation.

Organisations are most likely to work with consumers on:

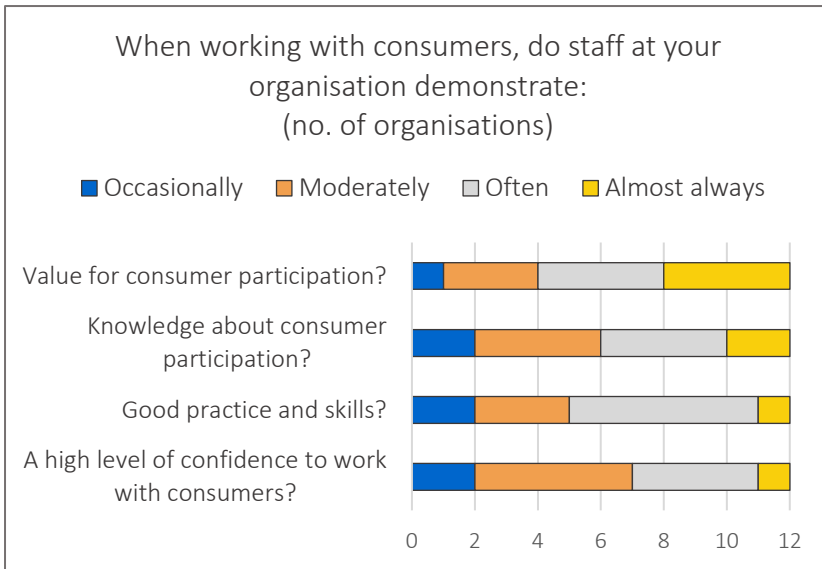
- Once-off consultations and surveys
- Service and project level input
- Committee participation

Collectively, organisations in Melbourne's west possess a wide range of consumer participation knowledge and expertise. While a small number of consumer participation activities are commonly used, survey results show that organisations are working with consumers in a wide variety of ways.

Enabling organisations to share and learn from each other will improve the ability of organisations to work with consumers in on a wide variety of activities, and build the capacity of the West as a whole.

Key finding #3: Organisations can build the capacity of their staff to partner with consumers by providing:

- Training that focuses on developing staff confidence in their knowledge, skills and practice.
- Organisational policy and procedure that provides guidance and support to staff.
- Leadership that encourages and supports consumer participation practice.



It is important that all staff use consumer input in their work. However, staff may lack the knowledge and skills required to work effectively with consumers. This is compounded by a lack of confidence in their own abilities to do so. Many organisations self-identified a need for staff training. However, it is important this training is supported through other capacity building activities.

While around two thirds of the organisations (69%) have a consumer participation policy or framework in place, about half of the organisations (46%) said this is an area they plan to work on in the next 12 months.

Executive leadership was most often identified as a key driver of consumer participation, by 77% of organisations. It is important that leaders and managers continue to support and build the capacity of their staff in this area.

Key finding #4: There is strong need to build the capacity of organisations in Melbourne’s west to measure consumer participation outcomes.

Measuring outcomes is essential to evaluate and improve consumer participation activities. Many organisations in Melbourne’s west do not measure consumer participation outcomes well and would benefit from guidance and good-practice examples of different approaches to measuring outcomes.

There is a lot of variation in how organisations measure consumer participation outcomes.

When measuring consumer participation outcomes:

- Only 25% of organisations use a mixed methods approach with 75% using one or two methods.
- Only 17% of organisations measure outcomes against a broad consumer participation plan.
- 24% of organisations do not measure outcomes from consumer participation activities, or do so poorly.

Recommendations for HealthWest Partnership:

Many organisations would benefit from support and guidance to implement and embed good consumer participation. HealthWest can support organisations in Melbourne’s west to work with consumers by providing:

- Networking and partnership opportunities for organisations and community groups to facilitate sharing of knowledge and expertise.
- Practical support to organisations to develop policies and frameworks, training and other resources.
- Continued projects to build the understanding of consumer participation in Melbourne’s west.

Recommendations for systems change:

Government and funding bodies may wish to consider the following to build consumer participation among the organisations and activities they support:

- Support consumer participation by increasing access to training and networking opportunities for staff and consumers of health and community organisations.
- Prioritise consumer participation when funding projects and activities and make consumer participation a required component in project plans and budgets.

