

Organisational implementation guide

Key Outcome Area 1

Consumer, carer and family participation



Consumer and carer participation is a central tenet in mental health policies and plans. Set standards and benchmarks are outlined in the *National Standards for Mental Health Services (2010)*. Participation encompasses a range of processes in which consumers, carers and family members are engaged to have their say at both individual and system levels and in the planning, development, delivery and evaluation of services.

CALD consumer and carer participation varies across jurisdictions, and generally lags behind mainstream achievements in participation. There are important factors to consider and acknowledge when working with CALD consumers and carers:

- Consumer and carer participation may be understood differently by diverse cultural groups.
- The consumer concept originated in western consumer driven societies.
- CALD communities may not share ideas around the role of the consumer, the bio-medical mental health system, or the concept of choice and power.
- The variety of mechanisms generally used to facilitate consumer and carer participation may not be applicable to CALD consumers, carers and their families.

The key cultural factors impacting participation levels are known to be:

- Familiarity with the concept of consumer participation
- Familiarity with, and acceptance of, concepts of advocacy
- Unrealistic expectations
- Mechanisms (e.g. committees, voluntary/ paid advocates) which are linked to cultural values
- Diverse and varied understandings of mental health and mental illness which may impede group processes.

Barriers such as stigma and shame, differing explanatory models of mental illness, low levels of mental health literacy, inappropriate or unfamiliar engagement strategies, and language barriers must be addressed before meaningful participation can be achieved.