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# Frequently Asked Questions

# Consumer, Family, Carer and Community Paid Participation

**Why does the Mental Health Commission (MHC) want to involve consumers, families, carers and community members in its work?**

Involving all stakeholders in the Mental Health Commission’s work is essential if improvements in mental health, alcohol and other drug outcomes are to be achieved. The MHC recognises the valuable contribution that consumers, families, carers and community members (people) make to planning, implementation, delivery and evaluation of mental health, and AOD programs and services.

**How does the MHC engage consumers, carers, families and community members?**

The MHC engages with consumers, families, carers and community members in a variety of ways. This includes as employees, volunteers, contractors, consultants and through the offer of paid participation. This information relates to people engaged in paid participation.

This can include being:

* a member of a steering committee or advisory group;
* specifically invited to a consultation forum, focus group or workshop;
* a member of a selection and/or recruitment panels; and
* engaged in a special project like developing resources, being a guest presenter, reviewing or evaluating information.

**How can someone be involved?**

The MHC circulates opportunities for participation through its dedicated consumer, family, carer and community contact list and various other networks including, Consumers of Mental Health WA (COMHWA), Helping Minds, Carers WA and Mental Health Matters 2.   
We also use this network to circulate information on behalf of other organisations that may be of interest to people or someone they know e.g. forums, training, focus groups, scholarships, recovery opportunities and the like.

If you would like to be on the MHC’s consumer, family, carer and community contact list, please contact the MHC’s Engagement and Consultation team on (08) 6553 0600 or email [louise.howe@mhc.wa.gov.au](mailto:louise.howe@mhc.wa.gov.au) or allison.barrett@mhc.wa.gov.au Your contact details will only be accessed by our Engagement and Consultation team and will not be distributed throughout the MHC or wider community without your permission.

**What participation payment is being offered?**

Participation and out of pocket expenses are offered to representatives, depending on the activity, in line with the MHC’s ‘*Consumer, Family, Carer and Community Paid Partnership Policy’* (the Policy). The [Policy](http://www.mhc.wa.gov.au/Libraries/pdf_docs/Paid_Partnership_Policy_6.sflb.ashx) can be found on the MHC website under the Engagement tab, consumers, family and carers.

The Policy acknowledges the variety of knowledge, skills and experiences required for genuine and meaningful participation and this is reflected in a tiered payment approach. The tiers include:

* Attendee:
* Active Participant;
* Advisor; and
* Consultant.

The Policy (on page 10) explains the different tiers and the payment rates offered.   
For example, attendance at a public forum does not attract the offer of payment, being specifically invited to a targeted consultation forum, membership on committee or being a guest presenter does. People engaged in more specialised and complex roles are engaged as consultants. Rates range from $35 per hour at the active participant tier to $70 at the advisor tier. Minimum payment is three hours. Consultant rates are negotiated through the usual government processes. The MHC recognises that people may incur out of pocket expenses and can offer reimbursement for approved expenses in line with the same Policy.

The offer of payment and out of pocket expenses is confirmed in writing before participation takes place. People do not have to accept a participation payment if they don’t want to. Or they may negotiate a lower rate, without giving reason. Payments are made directly into people’s bank accounts or by cheque. However for one off activities (like a focus group or consultation) a choice of a retail voucher may be offered.

**Is the participation payment considered income or wages?**

People participating in MHC activities are technically speaking considered volunteers. Centrelink and the ATO treat participation payments differently. The following is a brief outline of your obligations in respect to these two agencies.

###### Australian Tax Office

The Australian Tax Office (ATO) describes participation payments to volunteers as an [honorarium.](https://www.ato.gov.au/Non-profit/your-workers/volunteers/paying-volunteers/honorariums/) Whether an honorarium is assessable income of the volunteer depends on the nature of the payment and the volunteer’s circumstances. [Reimbursement](https://www.ato.gov.au/Non-profit/your-workers/volunteers/paying-volunteers/reimbursements/) of out of pocket expenses is not generally considered an income by the ATO. The MHC is simply reimbursing expenses to allow volunteers to fulfill their roles i.e. travel costs. As the MHC offers a range of roles and payment rates people should check with the ATO regarding their individual circumstances.

The ATO requires people without an Australian Business Number (ABN) to complete a Statement by Supplier once a year. The Statement by Supplier declares you are not supplying your services as a source of income. Otherwise, the MHC is required by law to deduct maximum tax from your participation payment. If you complete the form the MHC will not deduct any tax. If you are a consumer consultant with an ABN, you don’t need to complete the form but must provide an invoice to the service, or the service is required to deduct maximum tax from your payment.

###### CENTRELINK

Centrelink requires that people declare reportable income, including participation payments. This is counted as part of reportable earnings which affects Centrelink payment rates. [Centrelink](https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/enablers/income) can provide information on how much can be earned without affecting Centrelink payments. The way representatives receive payment (bank transfer, cheque or retail voucher) does not change whether it is a reportable earning. If you receive Centrelink benefits, it is your responsibility to notify Centrelink of reportable income.

**Please note:** Representatives should be aware that Centrelink may occasionally request documentation to substantiate the amount advised and/or they may contact the MHC for verification of the payment amount(s).

It is recommended that representatives keep a record of payments.

**How does the MHC identify consumer, family, carer and community members for different roles?**

On occasion’s people are directly invited to participate in a particular MHC activity or project as they hold specialised knowledge and experience relevant to that body of work.

Generally speaking when it comes to membership on committees or groups, expressions of interest that include selection criteria are circulated to a broad consumer, family and carer network. Applications are reviewed by a panel of two or three people comprising a member of the committee and one or two MHC staff members. At least one of these people is a consumer, family or carer. Applicants are assessed against the selection criteria and shortlisted. An informal interview may also be required. The Chair of the committee or group endorses the recommended applicant(s). The successful applicant is contacted by phone or email in the first instance, and provided a letter of appointment and relevant information pertaining to the work of the committee or group.

Participation on the committee or group is subject to a three meeting trial period during which time the member and committee can decide whether they are suited.

A criminal records screening check *may* be required, however a conviction does not exclude the applicant from the selection process by any means. The MHC will initiate and pay for the criminal records screening.

For insurance purposes people are covered under the MHC’s insurance policy (as volunteers) whilst engaged in MHC activities.

**What training and support can people access to assist with their participation?**

The MHC strongly encourages people to link in with the following organisations who can provide training and/or support to consumer, family, carer or community participation:

* **Consumers of Mental Health Western Australia (CoMHWA)**

CoMHWA provide training and support to mental health consumer representatives. Information about upcoming courses is available on the CoMHWA website at www.[comhwa.org.au](http://www.comhwa.org.au) or by telephone on (08) 9258 8911.

* **The Health Consumers Council of WA (HCC)**

HCC offers a range of free workshops to support people in becoming effective, engaged consumer representatives. Information about upcoming courses is available on the HCC website at [www.hconc.org.au](http://www.hconc.org.au) or by telephone on   
1800 620 780.

* **Carers Western Australia (Carers WA)**

Carers WA provide training and support for family and carer representatives. Information support and training and opportunities is available on the Carers WA website at [www.carerswa.asn.au](http://www.carerswa.asn.au) or telephone 1300 227 377.

* **HelpingMinds (formally ARAFMI)**

HelpingMinds can provide a family and carer network to link into as well as other family/carer supports. Further information about Helping minds is available on the website at <http://www.helpingminds.org.au> or by telephone on 1800 811 747.

* **Mental Health Matters 2 (MHM2)**

MHM2 is a community advocacy action group and can provide a network and support to consumers, family and carer representatives. Further Details about the group including information about upcoming events is available on their website at www.[mentalhealthmatters2.com](http://mentalhealthmatters2.com), alternatively MHM2 can be contacted via their facebook page at [www.facebook.com/mentalhealthmatters2perth](http://www.facebook.com/mentalhealthmatters2perth)**.**

People are supported in roles at the MHC by staff directly involved in the particular participation activity and by the Engagement and Consultation Team. As volunteers, people can also access to the MHC Employee Assistance Program.

**What about representation?**

People may be solely presenting their own perspective and experiences for a particular project or activity at the MHC, however most people have the role of representing, advocating or lobbing the consumer, family or carer perspective on a broader scale. It is important to understand that the roles for consumers, family, carers and community are not interchangeable and one cannot represent the other. The distinct views of each group should be respected.

It is understood that no one person can represent all views of consumers, family, carers and community members and are not expected to. However it is expected that people are linked into a group of peers that they can network and consult with. This may be a more formal network or organisation like the ones mentioned previously, a Consumer/Carer/Community Advisory Group (known as CAGs) attached to a health facility or an informal group of like-minded people who have gathered together to support each other.

As people will have their own experiences to draw from, it is vital that the MHC committees or activities are not used as personal platforms to bring about change for particular personal circumstances.

**What about confidentiality?**

Consumers, family, carers and community members are bound by the same rules of confidentiality as employees, volunteers and members of committees at the MHC. It can be a difficult task to balance a ‘representative’ role while at the same time maintaining confidentiality around a particular piece of work. People may be consulting, networking or reporting back to their peers, it should only be on matters of relevance.

**Contact Information**

We hope you have found this fact sheet of some assistance. For more information about engagement and participation at the MHC or feedback about this fact sheet, please contact the Engagement and Consultation Team on (08) 6553 0600.

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