



## **POLICY STATEMENT 6**

# **CONSUMER AND CARER PARTICIPATION WITHIN PRIVATE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

### **Background**

The lived experiences of consumers and their carers provide a rich source of information about the quality, effectiveness, accessibility and appropriateness of mental health services. They know what does, and what does not, work for them. Accordingly, the Network advocates for the promotion of recovery–focussed care through consumer and carer involvement, peer support and consumer–led services within private mental health services.

For the purposes of this Policy, private mental health services are those provided by private practitioners, private hospitals, private health insurers and private payers.

The Network seeks increased consumer and carer participation in private sector mental health services to mirror and exceed that of the public sector which has seen significant uptake since the introduction of the National Mental Health Strategy. The Strategy recognised that consumer and carer input were essential to achieve improvements to the quality of mental health service delivery in Australia. It focussed primarily on the public sector and the rights of public sector consumers and carers have been significantly promoted since the Strategy was introduced.

The Network continues to advocate for similar progress in consumer and carer participation within the private sector. As a general rule, there is still a need for urgent and substantial development of consumer and carer participation, by stakeholders involved in the funding and provision of treatment and care in private mental health settings. This includes positive changes in the way consumer and carer participation is seen.

The Network acknowledges that there are particular issues raised by the commercial, or for–profit, context in which the private mental health sector operates. However, the Network believes that this commercial requirement should not limit meaningful consumer and carer participation. There are three main areas of the private mental health sector in which consumer and carer participation should be more developed.

- Service delivery by mental health professionals in private practice, which the Network believes is most effectively achieved through consumer and carer participation in the relevant professional bodies.
- Service delivery by private hospitals.
- Funding decisions impacting on service delivery, made by Health Insurers.

The Network believes a greater focus on consumer and carer participation at all levels in private mental health services could and should be achieved, particularly when compared with the public sector.

## **Policy**

To achieve truly meaningful consumer and carer participation, all organisations involved in the funding and delivery of treatment and care in the private mental health sector should:

- formulate and adopt a comprehensive definition of consumer and carer participation for their organisations;
- engage appropriately qualified consumers and carers within funder and provider organisations as equal members of the service staff; and
- implement appropriate in-service mental health education, that includes consumers and their carers as educators.

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