



Policy Development Consultation Framework

Background

VICSERV is a membership-based peak body representing community-managed mental health services in Victoria. As a leader in the development and communication of strategic policy and practice issues relevant to the community managed mental health sector, our policy positions are based on our acquired knowledge as well as the contemporary experiences of our members. VICSERV's *Policy Development Consultation Framework* articulates how we engage members and other stakeholders in the policy development process, particularly in actively identifying emerging issues affecting the sector.

What is policy?

For the purposes of this framework, policy entails any public statements made by VICSERV which articulates its view-point in relation to an issue. The following are some examples of policy statements:

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- Submissions
 - Media statements
 - Report with recommendations
 - Feedback in response to call for comments
 - Advocacy campaigns
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What influences policy development?

Policies may be reactive or proactive in nature. When reactive, policies respond to externally driven occurrences. Examples of reactive policies include:

- Submissions in response to draft legislation or an inquiry
- Policy response as a result of new sector practices e.g. the *National Standards for Mental Health Services*
- Changed policies due to developments within in the sector e.g. rationalisation

Proactive policies on the other hand are internally driven and cause something to occur rather than waiting for something to happen. The following are examples of such policies:

- Research papers with calls to action

- State budget submissions
- Contributions, journal articles, opinion pieces designed to shape and influence discourse
- Advocacy campaigns

Issues requiring policy development may be sourced from:

- Research
- Monitoring publications and websites
- The media
- Member forums and events
- Interested parties advising VICSERV of an issue
- Public inquiries

Policies ultimately must be underpinned and guided by VICSERV's vision, mission and values as well as the *VICSERV 2009-2012 Strategic plan*.

Consultation and policy development

Consultation assists VICSERV to:

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- Enhance knowledge
 - Determine policy priorities
 - Gather views of members and interested persons on policy matters
 - Inform VICSERV's policy positions
 - Relay information to members
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Information gathered from consultations, in conjunction with research and organisational knowledge, substantiate VICSERV's policy positions. This evidence-base also allows VICSERV to confidently advocate for and develop resources which address issues concerning the sector.

Consultation also ensures that one view does not dominate the policy debate. While consultation is useful in order to sound-out different points of view, it does not guarantee that a particular view will be adopted in the final policy statement.

Considerations influencing consultation

How widely and with whom VICSERV will consult, ultimately depends on the following:

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- **Issue** – does it affect the whole community-managed mental health sector or only some agencies?
 - **Importance** – is the issue important in the context of VICSERV's vision, mission and values?
 - **Time** – the timeframes within which VICSERV is required to work
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- **Knowledge** – does VICSERV require more knowledge in order to understand the issue?

Degree of consultation

The extent of consultation will ultimately depend on the issue and available expertise. Consultation may span across various interested parties either in Victoria, interstate or nationally and may include:

- VICSERV members
- Consumers and consumer groups
- Carers and carer peak bodies
- Other community-managed mental health peak bodies
- Researchers and academics
- Specialist service providers
- Other community-based organisations

In relation to sector specific issues, VICSERV is likely to consult first and foremost with its members. VICSERV may also consult with other groups (listed above) in order to:

- to draw upon their expertise in relation to a particular issue
- to build VICSERV's knowledge-base in the development of policy
- to seek their views on a particular issue

VICSERV may also partner with other peak-bodies or organisations to formulate joint policy responses if the issue is likely to affect other groups and their views correspond with those of VICSERV.

Advisory groups may be required from time-to-time to provide expertise in particular policy areas and consider specific issues in-depth. These groups will consist of individuals who are able to provide strategic perspectives on issues. The terms of reference of each individual advisory group will set out its composition, aim, scope and duration as well as what is expected of its members.

Consultation Strategy

The strategy used to consult will depend on:

- **Timing** – how long VICSERV has to develop the policy
- **Issue** – the nature of the issue
- **Stakeholders** – who may potentially be affected by the issue

Subject to the above, any number or a combination of the following strategies may be used to develop policy:

More than one month for policy development

- Publish briefing material
- Invite feedback from stakeholders on issues of major importance
- Conduct face to face/telephone consultations with key stakeholders
- Establish advisory or working groups to explore issues concerning the sector, develop policy responses and resources

Less than one month for policy development

- Use email bulletins to canvass issues, pose questions and determine priority issues
- Identify key stakeholders/specialists and undertake telephone consultations
- With sector-based issues, source a variety of perspectives from the sector in a targeted manner – e.g. small, medium, large agencies, MSSH, consumer, carer, and advocacy groups (including other peak bodies)

VICSERV also engages in an ongoing consultation process in order to identify upcoming issues likely to affect the community-managed mental health sector. Continuing consultation may involve:

- **An annual policy review** across our members which will consist of guided and open ended questions to enable the gathering of qualitative and quantitative data on key policy issues. This will assist us to identify priority issues requiring policy development for the coming year.
- **Quarterly member forums** focusing on particular themes e.g. justice and consisting of a policy update for the quarter including interactive exchange of information with members.

Acknowledging contributions

Involvement in the consultation process (excluding participation in surveys) will be acknowledged in the following manner:

Where information is provided, VICSERV will:

- Acknowledge receipt
- Advise about expected outcomes and next steps
- Draw attention to relevant information resources and submissions
- Advise of any outcomes

Participation in advisory groups will similarly be recognised, with contributors formally acknowledged in any resulting publications as well as our annual reports.