

- 4.6 Employers need to ensure there are flexible and supportive work arrangements for all staff, including making reasonable adjustment for consumer and carer identified workers to enable them to carry out their work. This should include providing them with the opportunity to work in pairs and to job share with other consumer or carer identified workers.
- 4.7 Consumer and carer workers need to be provided with the same high quality performance management monitoring and support programs as other staff.
- 4.8 Employers need to ensure that training needs analyses are undertaken and ongoing training and professional supervision needs of all staff are addressed as part of the performance management framework for recovery oriented service provision involving the mental health consumer and carer identified workforce.
- 4.9 Employers need to address the potentially complex challenges of dual roles and role conflict for identified consumer and carer workers and ensure that these issues remain the focus of continuous quality improvement processes.
- 4.10 Employers need to ensure that accountability and independence are considered when designing roles for consumer and carer positions. This must include the input of all staff and consultation with consumers and carers.
- 4.11 Employers need to ensure the development and use of appropriate policies on disclosure of information and privacy. These must be informed by consultation with consumers and carers.
- 4.12 Demonstrated commitment to recovery approaches needs to become a skills requirement for employees being recruited to mental health services, particularly at senior and management levels. This includes, but must not be limited to, skills around using recovery approaches to work with consumer and carer identified workers.

Mental health managers and policy areas need to demonstrate their commitment to integrating recovery approaches by modelling appropriate behaviours towards the consumer and carer workforce and reallocating resources to support integration of this workforce. This should include training for mental health services staff on recovery and recovery oriented communication practices and recruitment for skills in recovery.

The new National Mental Health Workforce Strategy needs to be based on the implementation of a recovery framework in mental health that includes:

- integrating of education and training initiatives that reflect a recovery orientation into the basic and ongoing training of mental health disciplines;
- developing of education and training initiatives on 'working with consumer and carer identified workers'. Training should be scenario based and involve consumer and carer workers as educators.

Recommendation 5: Develop the future mental health consumer and carer identified workforce

As part of the National Mental Health Strategy, governments, mental health policy makers and mental health consumer and carer identified workers urgently need to focus on the future development of the mental health consumer and carer identified workforce to ensure its sustainability.

- 5.1 The information activities outlined in Recommendations 1-4 above should be used to inform the development of the National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Identified Workforce Strategy under the National Mental Health Workforce Strategy which will provide an ongoing platform for the development of excellence and innovation in the services that this workforce has to offer.

The Mental Health Standing Committee and the Private Mental Health Alliance need to explore opportunities for the development of pilot consumer and carer identified workforce development projects both within and outside the mental health sector, linking these as part of the 4th National Mental Health Plan, to opportunities under the National Mental Health Disability Employment Strategy.

- 5.2 Under the National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Identified Workforce Strategy, a formal national network of consumer and carer identified workers should be established to provide a support mechanism for local support networks and a forum for sector development.



**NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH
CONSUMER & CARER FORUM**

Supporting and developing the consumer and carer identified workforce – a strategic approach to recovery



**A POSITION STATEMENT BY THE NATIONAL MENTAL
HEALTH CONSUMER & CARER FORUM**

SEPTEMBER 2010

The National Mental Health Consumer & Carer Forum (NMHCCF) has a vision of mental health services that assist mental health consumers and carers to identify their own needs and work with them in an equal partnership towards recovery. They will be able to do this because mental health consumer and carer identified workers will be working as part of crisis assessment and treatment teams, inpatient units, mobile support and treatment teams, home based outreach services, supporting mental health consumers and carers and other service providers in the broader community and assisting the broader community to better meet the needs of mental health consumers and carers.

The NMHCCF have developed the Position Statement: *The mental health consumer and carer identified workforce – a strategic approach to recovery to assist governments, policy makers and services to realise this vision.* An important starting point will be the development of workplaces that value diversity strives to maximise the productivity of all its employees, however the mental health consumer and carer identified workforce is the primary focus of this Position Statement.

The NMHCCF Position Statement explores the status of the current mental health consumer and carer identified workforce in Australia and its potential as a key resource in the implementation of recovery in mental health services.

As more consumers and carers are being employed both in Australia and internationally, the evidence supporting the involvement of consumers and carers in their own care is becoming stronger. The benefits to improved service quality and the potential for cost savings due to improved recovery experiences and shorter hospital stays are also becoming clearer.

These positions are a powerful resource for services seeking to identify and eliminate those barriers that stop consumers and carers being able to work in partnership with mental health service providers to focus on recovery. But they cannot do it all by themselves. These positions need to be supported as part of a strategic approach to improving the culture of mental health workplaces so that they can be most effective.



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Mental health consumer and carer identified workers report that there is still much work to be done to ensure that this workforce is effectively supported and developed within the mental health service system, both public and private and in the community sector.

The NMHCCF Position Statement argues that the lack of progress around recovery is linked to the barriers to effective consumer and carer participation in mental health services. They include a lack of understanding about recovery, mental health stigma, a workplace culture that can not respond to change and is not yet able to work in equal partnership with consumers and carers.

An opportunity to address these needs exists with the implementation of the new 4th National Mental Health Plan. The Plan promotes the implementation of a recovery oriented culture within mental health services and the establishment of a peer specialist workforce in the mental health sector and an expansion of opportunities for meaningful involvement of consumers and carers.

The barriers faced will not be overcome without the commitment of national and state level policy makers, mental health services and the private health sector. If this commitment is not made and these barriers addressed, a recovery orientation will continue to remain elusive to many health services.

The NMHCCF calls on the state, territory and Australian governments, to show this commitment by developing a strategic approach to the implementation of the 4th National Mental Health Plan. This will involve identifying the barriers to change, empowering services to address these and developing appropriate performance indicators and public monitoring to drive this change.

As a key part of this the NMHCCF specifically calls for the development of a National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Identified Workforce Development Strategy. This Strategy will be the foundation for supporting this valuable workforce and will assist in establishing the sort of workplace culture that is essential for the effective implementation of recovery approaches appropriate for the 21st century.

The following recommendations comprise a strategic approach to the implementation of recovery by outlining the essential first steps to supporting the mental health consumer and carer workforce.

Recommendation 1: Provide leadership in mental health workforce development and implementing the 4th National Mental Health Plan

- 1.1 The mental health sector needs to show leadership by providing workplaces that value and support the needs of consumers and carers employed in the sector, in both identified consumer and carer positions and non-identified positions. Developing this type of workplace framework needs to be made a priority under the National Mental Health Workforce Strategy.
- 1.2 Governments need to demonstrate commitment to the priorities of the 4th National Mental Health Plan by developing an implementation plan that focuses on recovery oriented mental health services that will:
 - drive and measure progress on implementation;
 - include the development of appropriate key performance indicators that assist services to identify what steps need to be taken to implement the Plan.

This will need to include the following activities:

- making the mental health consumer and carer identified workforce a key priority under the National Mental Health Workforce Strategy through the development of a National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Identified Workforce Strategy;
- developing appropriate performance indicators focusing on the development of this workforce;
- actively supporting an integrated culture of continuous quality improvement by making it a priority for implementation;
- developing appropriate performance indicators to drive the implementation of recovery approaches using continuous quality improvement mechanisms and linking this with effective use of the mental health consumer and carer identified workforce.

Recommendation 2: Identify the existing mental health consumer and carer workforce

Under the National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Identified Workforce Strategy:

- 2.1 A national audit of occupied and vacant mental health consumer and carer identified positions needs to be undertaken to identify and inform the ongoing development and support needs of the mental health consumer and carer identified workforce in Australia, including:
 - position titles, roles, hours worked, current supports in place, remuneration and, whether they target specific population groups such as young people, older people or people from diverse cultural backgrounds;

- a national support and training needs analysis of the existing workforce;
- development of a national competency framework and nationally accredited training for consumer and carer identified workers.

- 2.2 This work needs to include the government, private and community sectors and needs to be informed by the implementation of the Personal Helpers and Mentors Program.
- 2.3 The National Mental Health Report, the Health Services in Australia Report and any other appropriate national reporting needs to include information on the numbers and roles of mental health consumer and carer identified workers in Australia.

Recommendation 3: Implement recovery oriented mental health services

- 3.1 To implement recovery oriented mental health services, governments, policy makers and services need to enable the mental health consumer and carer identified workforce to carry out its roles effectively by:
 - using effective change management practices to support the implementation recovery approaches;
 - developing and supporting workplace cultures that are collaborative and enabling;
 - integrating continuous quality improvement processes into day to day operations of services, including identification and removal of workplace procedural and structural barriers to the effective partnerships between consumers and carers and mental health service professionals.
- 3.2 The National Mental Health Performance and Benchmarking Framework and any associated reporting in the private sector needs to include the development of meaningful performance indicators that reflect a recovery orientation and a thriving consumer and carer workforce in mental health services. Performance indicators should be developed in consultation with consumers and carers and should capitalise on work already undertaken by services making gains in these areas.
- 3.3 Mental health services need to demonstrate a commitment to the key priority areas of the 4th National Mental Health Plan by utilising the skills of mental health consumer and carer identified workers as an integral part of their approach to the adoption of a recovery oriented service.

Recommendation 4: Support and develop the mental health consumer and carer identified workforce

Mental health policy makers, managers and service staff urgently need to address the basic tactical and strategic human resource requirements of those consumer and carer identified workers currently employed in mental health services.

- 4.1 The management of the mental health consumer and carer identified workforce should be monitored and the results used to inform progress on the National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Identified Workforce Strategy. Progress on state, territory and private sector performance should be detailed in the National Mental Health Report.

The key learnings of workplaces that are currently implementing effective recovery approaches and utilising the services of their mental health consumer and carer identified workforce need to be documented and promoted to all mental health services.

- 4.2 Employers urgently need to minimise the effects of stress on their consumer and carer workforce by carrying out risk assessment and developing risk management plans, addressing the strategies that ensure the health and safety of employees and the operational functioning of their role in workplaces.
- 4.3 Employers urgently need to consult with their established mental health consumer and carer identified workforce or consumer and carer advisory committee to identify appropriate job requirements and desired outcomes and develop clear and appropriate position descriptions for consumer and carer identified worker positions.

Employers also need to ensure that their recruitment processes for consumer and carer identified workers include the expertise of consumers and carers to develop duty statements and selection criteria that they are involved in selection processes for consumer and carer identified workers.
- 4.4 Employers urgently need to assess the parity of their current pay scales and formalise remuneration, superannuation and insurance arrangements for consumer and carer identified workers.
- 4.5 Employers urgently need to address the lack of access to resources and provide support in prioritising workloads for the realistic achievement of agreed work targets.