

# Guidelines

## Carer Representation Program



### Introduction

Working on a committee requires some understanding of meeting procedures, agendas and minutes - and can be overwhelming for those who do not have experience with this kind of work. These guidelines will give you the basics to begin your role as a Carer Representative.

The word 'committee' will be used through this document, although it is good to keep in mind that they can also be called councils, working groups, reference groups, management team and so on.

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### Who is a Carer Representative?

A Carer Representative voices the carer perspective and takes part in the decision making process on behalf of the carer community. As a Carer Representative, *you are not representing Carers WA in any way*- Carers WA are here to support you in your role by facilitation of participation payments and reimbursements, provision of additional information, networking opportunities, professional development and other support.

### Why is your role as a Carer Representative important?

The role of a Carer Representative is to provide a broad carer perspective as a member of a committee. This carer perspective adds another dimension to the bureaucratic, service provider, industry, academic or professional perspectives. The role of the Carer Representative involves:

- Presenting how carers may feel and think about certain issues
- Contributing the lived experience of being a carer
- Ensuring the committee recognises carer concerns
- Providing feedback to Carers WA about the activities of the committee related to carers
- Ensuring that you are accountable to carers
- Providing any relevant issues affecting carers

### What are your entitlements as a Carer Representative?

- Access to professional development and ongoing support from Carers WA.
- The opportunity to network with other Carer Representatives.
- Participation payments and reimbursements for travel and parking costs.

### Being an effective Carer Representative

There are a number of activities that will make a Carer Representatives' role most effective when sitting on a committee.

#### Before the Meeting

Preparation is the key to being an effective Carer Representative. It is important to do some homework before you attend your meeting.

- Read the agenda and make notes about any items on which you might wish to comment or ask questions about.
- Check the previous meeting minutes to see whether significant decisions or comments were correctly recorded. Check to see if your name is recorded against any actions from the last meeting.

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- Until you become familiar with the terminology, acronyms and history of the committee, never hesitate to seek clarification, eg:
  - Would you mind defining that term for me?
  - I don't know the background to that decision - could you fill me in briefly?
  - Why didn't that plan work?

### During the Meeting

Make notes during the meeting as you don't always have a chance to raise issues during the agenda items. When it is your turn to speak, you can raise those issues by referring back to your notes. Keep your own record of major decisions, and a summary of useful discussions.

### After the meeting

Complete the feedback form as soon after the meeting as possible. Feedback is an important part of Carer Representative work and provides valuable insights to the Carers WA Systemic Advocacy team. You can request to raise issues from your committee work at the next Carer Representative Network Meeting.

### Difficulties with the Committee

It is rare that any problems arise, but if you find that you are:

- not receiving documentation in time to prepare for meetings
- feeling that you are not being "heard" or treated as an equal committee member
- finding that decisions are not followed up

it is important to speak to the committee Chair before or after the meeting to express your concerns. If you find that things do not change or that you are uncomfortable with dealing directly with the Chair, contact the Carer Representation Advisor to discuss.

### Confidentiality

Committees often deal with matters which must remain confidential within the committee. Clarify the issue of confidentiality early on. Confidential information can become a problem where it routinely hinders consultation or where it is used to stifle discussion or compromise the independence of representatives – if you are feeling this way, please call the Carer Representation Advisor to discuss options / strategies.

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### Public statements

Always be cautious if asked to make a public statement such as a media interview, speech or to write for a journal or other publication. Please consult with one of the Advisors beforehand and remember that you are not working for Carers WA therefore mentioning its name in your statement is not allowed unless advised otherwise.

### Carer's lived experience

Your strength is in your own knowledge and lived experience and the experiences of others carers. It helps if you have the ability to:

- Analyse an issue, and judge its effects on carers;
- Move away from a personal opinion to a viewpoint that takes account of the diversity of experiences and needs of carers;
- Present an argument rationally and convincingly;
- Imagine the consequences of decisions, in the short and long term;
- Distinguish who you are representing.

### Consult

Consulting with carer peers and Carers WA is crucial to ensuring effective representation. Through consultation you ensure that you are speaking for a wider group and not just providing a personal opinion.

### Improve your skills

All these skills can be learnt! You may find it useful to attend a course in negotiating, public speaking, assertiveness, or communication skills. Carers WA also provides Orientation and ongoing workshops where you can learn more about the skills valuable to committee work.

### A final word

It is worth reiterating that committee work can be difficult! You will win some issues but not all. If Carer Representatives can change the culture of committees, which are often technical and paternal, into seeing that carers are legitimate stakeholders, then this is very valuable.

Each small change you make as a Carer Representative adds to this attitude and benefits all carers in the long term.

Sometimes, your gains may not be obvious until many years later. Acknowledge that you have had a valuable and important role in the big picture of Carer Representation.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Are Carer Representatives employees and what are my entitlements?**

Carer Representatives are volunteers, not employees of Carers WA. Carer Representatives provide advice that is independent from the Carers WA organisation, based on their own lived experience as a carer. Carer Representatives are paid an honorarium (a payment contribution for volunteering) and may also receive out of pocket expenses.

### **Who Pays Me?**

Carers WA will facilitate the participation payment and travel reimbursements. You will need to complete a remuneration form and an Australian Tax Office Statement by Supplier Form.

### **What Can I Be Paid / Reimbursed for?**

Carer Representatives are reimbursed for time spent participating in approved health / mental health related meetings. Out of pocket expenses include public transport costs / mileage and parking. Any additional potential expenses MUST be pre-approved by Carers WA to ensure the activity falls under the scope of our funding agreements with the Department of Health and the Mental Health Commission.

### **I'm a Carer Consultant / Employee: Does this apply to me?**

If you are a consultant, this usually means you are either an employee or offer your services as a small business. If you are an employee, your payment would be as a wage or salary and is likely to be more than an honorarium fee.

If you run a small business, you may charge a fee for service instead of an honorarium. This would be mutually agreed in advance between yourself and a service and both parties must be clear whether an honorarium or fee for service is being offered / requested.

### **What is an ATO Statement by Supplier Form?**

If you don't have an ABN, then you need to declare that you are not supplying your services as a source of income. Otherwise, the service is required by law to deduct maximum tax from your payment. If you complete the form, your payment is tax free.

### **How does my participation payment impact my tax declaration?**

The Australian Tax Office does not require you to declare honorarium participation payments. Honorary rewards for voluntary services are not assessable as income and related expenses are not deductible.

### **How does my participation payment impact my Centrelink Payments?**

Centrelink requires that you declare your reportable income, including participation payments. This is counted as part of your reportable earnings, and how much you earn can affect your Centrelink payment rates. Centrelink can provide more information specifically relating to your payment.

### **How does my participation payment impact my public or community housing?**

Community housing providers are required to set income limits for housing eligibility determined by Department of Housing, similar to if you were in a public ('Homeswest') house. The Department of Housing aligns income to Centrelink's definition; therefore it is reportable income. Depending on how much you earn, your earnings may affect how much you pay in rent, or whether you remain eligible for public/community housing.