

**Mental Health  
Australia**

# **Annual Issues & Opportunities Workshop — Webinar Report**

The Ethics of Representation Q&A with Dr Simon Longstaff AO

18 June 2020



Mentally healthy people,  
mentally healthy communities

[mhaustralia.org](https://mhaustralia.org)

## Introduction: Annual issues & opportunities workshop

Each year, Mental Health Australia hosts a two-day Annual Issues and Opportunities Workshop for members of the National Register of Mental Health Consumer and Carer Representatives (National Register) and the National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum (NMHCCF). This year, members from the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Mental Health Consumer and Carer Group from the Embrace Multicultural Mental Health Project were also invited to attend.

This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the two-day face-to-face workshop was not possible, so the 2020 Annual Issues and Opportunities Workshop will occur across the year as a webinar series.

These webinars aim to further develop the representative skills of mental health consumers and carers already participating in national policy initiatives. In particular, the webinars are designed to develop representatives' advocacy, policy development, and leadership skills. The webinars also provide important networking opportunities for representatives.

The theme for the 2020 webinar series is **Consumer and Carer Leadership in a Time of Crisis – Social, Environmental and Political**.

The second Annual Workshop webinar was held on 18 June 2020 and was a facilitated Q&A webinar with Dr Simon Longstaff AO from The Ethics Centre.

Simon Longstaff began his working life on Groote Eylandt in the Northern Territory of Australia. He is proud of his kinship ties to the Anindilyakwa people. After a period studying law in Sydney and teaching in Tasmania, he pursued postgraduate studies as a Member of Magdalene College, Cambridge. In 1991, Simon commenced his work as the first Executive Director of The Ethics Centre. In 2013, he was made an officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for "distinguished service to the community through the promotion of ethical standards in governance and business, to improving corporate responsibility, and to philosophy." Simon is an Honorary Professor at the Australian National University, a Fellow of CPA Australia, the Royal Society of NSW and the Australian Risk Policy Institute.

The webinar was titled "The Ethics of Representation". A total of 30 consumer and carer representatives attended the 2-hour webinar.

This report provides highlights from the webinar and a summary of the key themes and outcomes raised during the webinar or through the subsequent evaluation survey.



## Webinar 2: The Ethics of Representation with Dr Simon Longstaff AO

### Webinar questions

Prior to the workshop, consumers and carers were asked to send through questions for Simon related to the ethics of representation. The Mental Health Australia team then delivered these questions to Simon in the webinar. They were as follows:

1. Sometimes advocacy work/an advocacy position can conflict with the advocate's personal ethics. How can they reconcile this?
2. Do you see yourself as fighting for change/dancing with oppressors/opponents/naysayers? Do you even see people in these terms or is this a detrimental way of feeling and thinking about people?
3. What are the ethics associated with sharing the stories that people entrust to us as representatives?
4. How do you manage yourself when you feel you are being disrespected or disregarded by others in your work?
5. What do you see as the ethics associated with being a representative of a cohort at the national level and how can we be more ethics focussed in our approach to representative activities?
6. In advocacy, how do you change someone's mind or, if this isn't possible, influence them so they can see your point of view/why it's important?
7. What are the best strategies to use when advocating for change?

### Key themes raised

- It is important when using peoples' stories that you are not objectifying them or contravening a person's dignity
- Consent given under conditions that are less than ideal is not really consent
- If you are faced with the situation where someone has drawn their own conclusions about a story and are running with it but it is not true to the story, do you preserve the integrity or dignity of the person the story is about or do you let the story run if it is going to have a benefit?
- Sometimes in representation, it is important not to expect yourself to achieve a level of perfection that is not possible in that environment
- Question everything and do not act in conformity with established practices. Consciously check each choice to ask: "is this choice an authentic expression of the purpose, values and principles that have been defined for the role?"
- Changing another person's mind is doomed to failure as an approach. However people sometimes change their own mind if you take them entirely seriously, without guile and with absolute sincerity and curiosity
- When you get a seat at the table you sit not just as a representative to push a wheelbarrow, but to serve the interests of the group as a whole.



## Feedback

An evaluation survey was sent to all participants following the webinar, which 12 webinar participants responded to. These responses help gauge the level of participant satisfaction with the webinar as well as participants' reflections and insights.

### Example Reflections

100% of Evaluation Survey respondents reported being very satisfied or satisfied with the webinar overall.

*"One word, Brilliant! Simon is just so solid in the way he presents - even when he has no real answer - something for us to learn from in that."*

*"I could listen to Simon speaking all day. As a long term (25 years) advocate, I would have been a much better advocate much earlier if I had listened to the wisdom of this oracle from early in my life. How did I not know about him until last year?"*

*"Simon had relevant and practical insights that were very helpful in my role."*



## Appendix 1: Webinar Attendees

### **National Register of Mental Health Consumer and Carer Representatives (the National Register)**

The National Register is a pool of 60 trained mental health consumer and carer representatives from across Australia. National Register members work at the national level to provide a strong consumer and carer voice in the mental health sector. The National Register is a Mental Health Australia project.

### **National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum (NMHCCF)**

The NMHCCF is a combined national voice for mental health consumers and carers. The NMHCCF listen, learn, advocate and influence in matters of mental health reform. Mental Health Australia auspices and has a formal Memorandum of Understanding with the NMHCCF.

### **Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Mental Health Consumer and Carer Group**

The CALD Mental Health Consumer and Carer Group is comprised of a CALD mental health consumer and a carer representative from each state and territory of Australia. The CALD Group includes a passionate, energised and diverse mix of voices, and provides advice to the National Multicultural Mental Health Project Alliance based on members' lived experience and connections to their communities.



## Appendix 2: 2020 Workshop Working Group

The 2020 Annual Workshop planning was informed by a working group of consumer and carer representatives, who helped shape the theme, speakers and presenters for the webinar series.

The working group developed the theme of “Consumer and Carer Leadership in a Time of Crisis – Social, Environmental and Political” for this year’s Annual Workshop, which provided a focus for the webinar series.

Working group members included:

Susan Adam  
Carer Representative — National Register Member

Fay Jackson  
Consumer Representative — National Register Member

Noel Muller  
Consumer Representative — National Register member

Carli Sheers  
Consumer Representative — National Register Member

Hayley Solich  
Carer Representative — NMHCCF and National Register Member



**For more information** please contact the Consumer and Carer Team at Mental Health Australia on 02 6285 3100 or at [natreg@mhaustralia.org](mailto:natreg@mhaustralia.org).

*Mental Health Australia is the peak, national non-government organisation representing and promoting the interests of the Australian mental health sector and committed to achieving better mental health for all Australians. It was established in 1997 as the first independent peak body in Australia to represent the full spectrum of mental health stakeholders and issues. Mental Health Australia members include national organisations representing consumers, carers, special needs groups, clinical service providers, professional bodies, public and private mental health service providers, researchers and state/territory community mental health peak bodies.*



# Mental Health Australia



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Mental Health Australia is the peak independent national representative body of the mental health sector in Australia.

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