

Consumer Reference Group Communique

Canberra, 30 – 31 August 2012

Diverse Voices, Shared Vision

The project to establish the new National Mental Health Consumer Organisation (NMHCO) under the auspice of the Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA) has begun. The Consumer Reference Group (CRG) has been convened to provide the MHCA with expert consumer advice on the establishment of the NMHCO by developing a collaborative approach to project planning, implementation and evaluation.

The CRG met for the first time in Canberra on 30 and 31 August 2012. The primary purpose of the meeting was to begin the collaborative planning process for the establishment of the NMHCO. The recommendations from the final report of the *Scoping Study to Inform the Establishment of a New Consumer Peak National Mental Health Consumer Organisation*¹ and the Australian Government response provided the foundation for discussion over the two days.

Outcomes

CRG members agreed that their energy, enthusiasm and commitment to sound process, together with their diverse voice and shared vision, will contribute to the development of a robust and sustainable peak organisation in the future. Members shared a sense of confidence in their ability to deliver strong consumer input to this project. Agreed meeting outcomes were:

- an indicative legal framework for the CRG and MHCA to work towards for the new organisation
- a focus on great governance in all aspects of NMHCO business
- modelling a recovery framework in all aspects of the NMHCO establishment and within the context of the independent entity.

Meeting Parameters

The inaugural meeting of the CRG and the MHCA was independently facilitated and aimed to provide orientation to, and understanding of, the scope and parameters of the NMHCO Establishment Project. Orientation included presentations from the Department of Health and Ageing and the MHCA.

Developing an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of CRG members and the MHCA project team, and establishing good communication channels, was a central focus. This will foster a strong and collaborative relationship throughout the life of the NHMCO establishment project and beyond.

¹ Final Report *Scoping Study to Inform the Establishment of a New Peak National Mental Health Consumer Organisation* (2010). Craze Lateral Solutions.

National Mental Health Consumer Organisation Establishment Project

An introduction to establishing governance training session was delivered to develop and strengthen a broad understanding of corporate governance as it may apply to the NMHCO. In particular, the governance matters the CRG needs to consider when providing advice to the MHCA Board in relation to the preferred governance framework for the new organisation. Presenting the CRG with these essential matters was an important first step, and further governance advice and training will be offered to CRG members.

Who are the CRG?

The CRG is populated with talented and skilled mental health consumer advocates committed to shaping a better future. Profiles of CRG members have been included on the NMHCO establishment project website www.mhconsumer.org.au.

Register your interest

The CRG is committed to fostering genuine participation in this process by people with a lived experience of mental health issues and other stakeholders across Australia. Anyone interested in mental health reform and social justice is encouraged to register for updates via the project website. The website will also be used to post important messages that will alert stakeholders to opportunities to participate.

If you would like to keep up to date on the establishment of the NMHCO please register at www.mhconsumer.org.au.

Consumer Reference Group Communique

Sydney, 12 – 13 November 2012 Engagement, Communication and Participation

The Consumer Reference Group (CRG) and the Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA) are working towards the establishment of a robust and sustainable National Mental Health Consumer Organisation (NMHCO). This work is being informed by the recommendations of the final report of the *Scoping Study to Inform the Establishment of a New Consumer Peak National Mental Health Consumer Organisation*¹ and the Australian Government response.

The CRG and the MHCA had their second meeting in Sydney on 12-13 November 2012. The NSW Consumer Advisory Group (CAG) boardroom was the venue for the two day meeting. NSW CAG is co-located with the Mental Health Association NSW (MHA) and Mental Health Carers ARAFMI NSW.

Engagement and communication

The CRG are keen to ensure the views of the diversity of people with lived experience of mental illness are heard and inform the establishment of the new organisation.

CRG members and the MHCA project team appreciated the opportunity to meet with NSW CAG, MHA NSW and ARAFMI NSW to discuss their core activities and current priorities, as well as their thoughts on the future national mental health consumer peak. The CRG and MHCA are committed to developing and strengthening collaborative partnerships and will be looking for opportunities to meet with other state and territory mental health consumer peaks over the course of the project.

The key communications consultant on the *Every Australian Counts* (NDIS) campaign spoke to CRG members and the MHCA project team about strategic communications and community engagement. Her presentation highlighted key strategies, which will be considered by the CRG and MHCA in the development of a NMHCO Establishment Project Engagement and Communications Strategy.

Outcomes

The CRG have maintained a high level of energy and enthusiasm and this contributed to a productive two day meeting. Agreed meeting outcomes include:

- the CRG and MHCA are beginning to shape a comprehensive NMHCO Establishment Project Engagement and Communication Strategy. Key aims of the Strategy will include:
 - communicating the broad project objectives
 - building and strengthening collaborative partnerships with state and territory mental health consumer peaks
 - identifying potential stakeholders and future national consumer peak members

¹ Final Report *Scoping Study to Inform the Establishment of a New Peak National Mental Health Consumer Organisation* (2010). Craze Lateral Solutions. Available: [click here](#)

National Mental Health Consumer Organisation Establishment Project

- developing processes to ensure the voices of grass roots consumers are heard, including people with a lived experience of mental illness who are marginalised and hard to reach
- identifying and promoting shared opportunities.

The Strategy will use a broad range of approaches to engage and consult with consumers, with a commitment to the use of appropriate language that reflects the consumer movement's history and vision for social justice.

- following consultation with the CRG, the NMHCO Establishment Project Plan and the Environmental Scan on Governance and Related Issues² have been completed
- CRG Terms of Reference and Committee Handbook have been drafted and will be finalised out of session
- early work on a broad vision for the new organisation will be considered further by the CRG
- the CRG and MHCA will begin to canvas the views of people who have registered their interest on the www.mhconsumer.org.au website.

Promoting participation

The CRG has identified the engagement of marginalised and hard to reach consumers as a priority.

While the project website is an important communication tool, some people may not have access to information technology and a range of engagement and communications approaches are needed.

To help expand our reach and encourage greater participation, we encourage you to discuss engagement and communication with your friends and colleagues, particularly those without internet access. Please then visit the project website and complete a short engagement and communication survey [[click here](#)], including responses from the people you have spoken to, if appropriate and with their consent.

Register your interest

The CRG is committed to fostering genuine participation in this process by people with a lived experience of mental health issues and other stakeholders across Australia. Anyone interested in mental health reform and social justice is encouraged to register for updates via the project website. The website will also be used to post important messages that will alert stakeholders to opportunities to participate.

If you would like to keep up to date on the establishment of the NMHCO please register at www.mhconsumer.org.au.

Who are the CRG?

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² *Environmental Scan on Governance and Related Issues for the New Mental Health Consumer Organisation* (2012). Craze Lateral Solutions. Available: [click here](#)

Consumer Reference Group Communique

Melbourne, 7-8 February 2013 Governance, Engagement and Relationships

The Consumer Reference Group (CRG) and the Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA) are working towards building the new National Mental Health Consumer Organisation (NMHCO). The *Scoping Study to Inform the Establishment of a New Consumer Peak National Mental Health Consumer Organisation*¹ and the Australian Government response continues to guide the NMHCO Establishment Project.

The CRG have established a strong collegial relationship and continue to work consistently towards achieving a sustainable national mental health consumer organisation built on good governance.

On 7-8 February 2013, the CRG and MHCA met to continue their collaborative work in establishing good governance for the new organisation.

A Constitution - The beginnings of Good Governance for the New Organisation

The second governance workshop facilitated by Board Matters provided an opportunity for the CRG to consider the development of a draft constitution for the new organisation. The importance of a constitution as a first step in the structuring of a good governance framework for the new organisation was also discussed.

In broad terms, a constitution sets out the rights, powers and duties of an incorporated entity, the Board, each director and depending on whether the entity is for-profit or not-for-profit, each shareholder or member respectively.

A number of matters relating to the content of a constitution were presented and discussed, including:

- naming the organisation
- objects of the organisation
- membership
- the Board.

The kind of entity the new organisation might be was determined a priority for consideration by the CRG. The CRG agreed that the organisation would be part of the not-for-profit sector. It is also anticipated that the new organisation will be established as a charity.

In selecting the legal 'vehicle' for the new organisation, the CRG was of the view that a company limited by guarantee was the better structure. When considering the different legal structures available, the CRG took into account the Scoping Study recommendations, and that the company limited by guarantee structure recognises the national jurisdiction of not-

¹ Final Report of the *Scoping Study to Inform the Establishment of a New Peak National Mental Health Consumer Organisation* (2010). Craze Lateral Solutions. Available: [click here](#)

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for-profit entities in Australia. A company limited by guarantee also requires a degree of transparency through its financial and reporting obligations, yet provides flexibility to implement good governance within the organisation.

Seeking your comment

As the auspicing entity, the MHCA Board is responsible for decisions on setting up the legal, financial and interim constitutional governance infrastructure of the new consumer organisation, with guidance from the CRG.

Before the CRG make a recommendation to the MHCA Board regarding their preference for the new organisation to be a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, they would like to hear your feedback.

If you are interested in providing your opinion on the proposed direction, please send comments to enquiry@mhconsumer.org.au. The closing date for feedback is 2 April 2013. More information on the pros and cons of a company limited by guarantee and information about not-for-profit entities can be found here:

[Company limited by guarantee factsheet](#)

from the ACT Council of Social Services website: <http://www.actcoss.org.au>

[Registering not-for-profit or charitable organisations](#)

from the Australian Securities and Investments Commission website:

<http://www.asic.gov.au/asic/>

[Who can register with the ACNC factsheet](#)

from the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission website:

<https://www.acnc.gov.au>

Other meeting outcomes

Inspired and energised by the outcomes from the governance workshop, the CRG also achieved the following outcomes:

- endorsement of the Terms of Reference (TOR). The TOR have since been endorsed by the MHCA Board, signed by both Chairs and published on the Project website.
- finalisation of the CRG Committee Handbook. The Handbook builds on the TOR and details processes, policies and procedures to support the NMHCO Establishment Project and the responsibilities of the CRG and the MHCA.
- consideration of the draft tender to engage a communications consultant to develop the Engagement and Communication strategy. This discussion was informed by the results of the recent Engagement, Communications and Participation survey (see below). A selective request for tender for this work is currently underway.
- agreement to make contact with and begin building relationships with national peaks including Mental Health in Multicultural Australia (MHiMA) and the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), and state and territory mental health consumer peaks

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- agreement to submit abstracts for presentations at THeMHS Conference in August 2013 (Consumer Day and the conference proper).

The Engagement, Communication and Participation Survey

The CRG would like to thank the 206 people who responded to the recent on-line survey. The survey was sent to the 400 people who had registered their interest via the Project Website. The results of the survey were discussed at length by the CRG and will be considered during the development of the Engagement and Communication Strategy.

The results revealed that targeting mental health consumer groups that are hard to reach will be essential in shaping future engagement strategies, and that engaging with a wide and diverse community of mental health consumers is also important. Word of mouth was clearly identified as the most important and effective medium for communicating important messages to hard to reach groups. This was closely followed by print media such as newspapers, magazines and the Big Issue. The survey also asked people to provide their post code, which revealed a significant gap in reaching rural and remote mental health consumers.

The Engagement, Communication and Participation Survey Summary report can be viewed on the NMHCO Establishment Project website www.mhconsumer.org.au.

Register your interest

The CRG is committed to fostering genuine participation in the establishment of the new national mental health organisation by people with a lived experience of mental health issues and other stakeholders across Australia. Anyone interested in mental health reform and social justice is encouraged to register for updates via the project website (see below). We now have over 500 registrations, and look forward to continuing to engage with the diverse mental health community.

If you would like to keep up to date on the establishment of the NMHCO please register at www.mhconsumer.org.au.

Who are the CRG?

The CRG members are talented and skilled mental health consumer advocates committed to shaping a better future. Profiles of CRG members are included on the NMHCO Establishment Project website www.mhconsumer.org.au.

Consumer Reference Group Communique

Canberra, 2-3 May 2013

Looking to the Future: Our Vision and Mission for the New Organisation

The Consumer Reference Group (CRG) and Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA) continue to develop the new national mental health consumer peak body. Aimed at having a positive impact on the lives of people living with mental illness, the new organisation will be a peak body that truly represents hope and change.

Creating our vision and mission

The CRG agreed that aspirational overarching vision and mission statements for the new organisation are an immediate priority. They will provide clarity about the role and purpose of the organisation and its position within the Australian community. These statements will also provide an important focus as the CRG and the MHCA continue to develop the governance framework for the new organisation.

The CRG came up with these ideas:

Possible vision statements

1. A world where we live the life we want
2. Lives changed, lives lived
3. Inspiring hope and changing lives together
4. Nothing about us without us¹

Possible mission statements

1. To change lives and inspire hope through advocacy, cultural change, participation and leadership
2. A national voice for the diversity of consumers to influence policy, improve services, and be involved
3. To increase the wellbeing of mental health in the Australian community, through engaging people with lived experience
4. To represent mental health consumers through advocacy, cultural change, participation, leadership and hope
5. To improve the lives of people with mental illness, through advocacy cultural change, participation and leadership

Have your say

These statements are examples of what the vision and mission might look like for the new organisation. However, the final statements will be informed by your feedback. The CRG encourages everyone to provide feedback on the suggested statements, or to provide alternative views to help the new organisation best represent the needs of mental health consumers in Australia.

Yes I would like to have a say!

If you would like to comment on the vision and mission for the new organisation please follow this [link](#) or access the feedback form directly on the website <http://mhconsumer.org.au>.

¹ Please note: this phrase has been used in the mental health and disability advocacy sectors nationally and internationally. It was also the vision of the previous mental health consumer peak, the Australian Mental Health Consumer Network.

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First CRG recommendation endorsed by the MHCA Board

The MHCA Board is responsible for decisions about the new organisation's governance structures, with guidance from the CRG.

An exciting outcome following the February 2013 CRG meeting was MHCA Board endorsement of the CRG recommendation that the new organisation be a not-for-profit Company Limited by Guarantee. This is the first step in establishing the governance framework for the new organisation.

Engagement and Communication Strategy

Essential Media Communication (EMC) are working with the CRG and MHCA on the Engagement and Communication Strategy for the project. EMC were directly involved in the Every Australian Counts National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) campaign and come to the NMHCO Establishment Project with extensive experience working with membership organisations. The EMC team facilitated a workshop on day two of the CRG meeting, which included:

- defining success for the project and the new organisation – how do we know we have achieved what we set out to do?
- areas for engagement and feedback
- identifying and prioritising stakeholders or interested parties.

Stakeholder interviews will also inform the development of the Strategy. More information on these consultation activities and the development of the Strategy will be available soon.

Developing the constitution continues

The third governance workshop facilitated by Board Matters provided the opportunity for the CRG to continue working on developing the constitution. The CRG discussed:

- the type of Charity the new Organisation might be
- membership options, including consideration of the recommendation from the '*Scoping Study to inform the Establishment of a New Peak National Mental Health Consumer Organisation*'²
- Board structure.

Register your interest

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² '*Scoping Study to inform the Establishment of a New Peak National Mental Health Consumer Organisation*'. Craze Lateral Solutions. 2010

National Mental Health Consumer Organisation Establishment Project



Making progress through consultation and best practice

Consumer Reference Group *Communique*

Canberra 22-23 July 2013

Vision and mission statements for the new organisation

An inspiring and exciting part of the recent meeting of the Consumer Reference Group (CRG) in Canberra was considering the results of the recent Vision and Mission Statements Survey.

The CRG would like to thank the many people who responded to the survey, we had a great response!

The July 2013 meeting was the first opportunity for the CRG to review and discuss the results of the survey, and we were energised by the responses and feedback. With some minor changes informed by your feedback, we agreed that the most inspirational vision statement was:

'Inspiring hope and improving lives together'

The results showed a mixed and varied response to the mission statement. However, what emerged from a combination of statements and key words was:

'To inspire hope, improve lives and promote mental health and well-being through advocacy, cultural change, participation and leadership'

This mission statement may need a little more work. The CRG will be at the TheMHS Consumer Forum and TheMHS Conference in August 2013, which will be an opportunity for more discussion on the vision and mission statements.

The vision and mission statements will help inform the drafting of the constitution for the new national mental health consumer organisation.

The Survey Results Summary Report can be found on the Project website www.mhconsumer.org.au.

Here is a summary of other important meeting outcomes.

Engagement and communications

The preliminary results of the survey conducted by the Project's communications consultants were another highlight. The results will add substance and value to the **Engagement and Communication Strategy**. The Strategy will support opportunities over the next 12 months to meet with you and many other important stakeholders, and strengthen and improve how we share the Project journey with all our supporters.

Developing a constitution

The CRG was very pleased to have resolved a number of important governance issues, with assistance from our governance expert. We were somewhat surprised at how complex these issues are.

Pulling apart and running a consumer eye over the elements that will make up the constitution for the new organisation has been a priority, and has taken up much of the CRG's attention and time over the last 12 months. Together with advice from our governance expert, the Scoping Study¹ recommendations and the Australian Government's Response have informed discussions and decisions.

The outcomes of this work are outlined below. Please take time to read them and provide us feedback. The CRG's recommendations will go to the MHCA Board for final endorsement.

Membership

The voting membership for the new national mental health consumer peak organisation should be a hybrid structure. This recommendation supports the Scoping Study of a hybrid voting membership which will comprise of:

- ✓ individuals
- ✓ nationally-based and state-based mental health consumer organisations; and
- ✓ other mental health consumer organisations, groups and networks.

Board structure

The Board will consist of nine Directors. A majority of Directors will be elected by members, will have a lived experience of mental illness, and possess a range of skills and knowledge. A small number of Directors will be appointed for skills (i.e. financial management, business expertise). The skill mix needed by appointed Directors will be determined according to the needs of the Organisation.

¹ *Scoping to Inform the Establishment of a New Peak National Mental Health Consumer Health Organisation.* Craze Lateral Solutions. March 2010

Charitable status

The new national mental health consumer peak will seek to be a Health Promotion Charity (HPC). The HPC status would provide the new organisation with important taxation advantages that include gaining deductible gift recipient (DGR) status. DGR is not available to other charitable status options and can assist in fundraising efforts.

At the end of the day it is a matter of law that will determine the type of charity the new Organisation will be. However, the CRG are confident that the HPC status is the best option.

If you would like more information on the HPC Status for taxation purposes, the Australian Charities and Not-For Profit Commission (ACNC) has produced a relatively 'easy read' fact sheet:

https://www.acnc.gov.au/ACNC/Pblctns/Factsheets/FS_HPC/ACNC/FTS/Fact_HPC.aspx.

Once drafted, the constitution will be made available for further community consultation.

Project timeline

In response to feedback from the communications survey, the Project Timeline will be put onto the Project website in the near future. The Timeline will show the milestones that have been achieved over the last 12 months, and what still needs to be done through to the end of the Project in September 2014.

CRG presenting at the TheMHS Consumer Forum and TheMHS Conference August 2013

The CRG will be presenting at both the Consumer Forum on 20 August and TheMHS Conference on 22 August 2013. We recognise this as a great opportunity to meet with people interested in the Project, those who would like to get involved but are not sure how, and to answer questions you may have.

For more information on TheMHS Conference go to <http://www.themhs.org.au/2013-annual-conference->.

Providing feedback

Some CRG members have received emails with feedback specifically related to the NMHCO Establishment Project. Members of the CRG have competing obligations and limited capacity to respond to individual emails about the project.

To help us respond to your feedback in a responsive and considered way, please send comments, questions or concerns to enquiry@mhconsumer.org.au. The MHCA secretariat will collate emails and other correspondence for the CRG's attention at the next meeting.

Your constructive, solution focussed feedback is welcomed by the CRG and we look forward to hearing and responding to your thoughts and ideas.

Warmest regards,

Ian Watts

CRG Chairperson

On behalf of all the members of the CRG

Like to find out more about the CRG?

Profiles of CRG members can be found on the Project website www.mhconsumer.org.au.

Register your interest

Over 500 people have now registered their interest in the NMHCO Establishment Project, are you one of them?

To stay up to date and alerted to opportunities to work with us to develop the new national mental health consumer peak you can register your interest via the Project website www.mhconsumer.org.au.

Contact Us

To contact members of the CRG, or to make a general enquire about the NMHCO Establishment Project please email enquiry@mhconsumer.org.au.

You can also call the Project Manager, Jodie Fisher, at the Mental Health Council Australia on (02) 6285 3100 or email jodie.fisher@mhca.org.au.

National Mental Health Consumer Organisation Establishment Project



Shaping Your Organisation: Make Your Mark

Consumer Reference Group

Communique

Adelaide, 7- 8 November 2013

Participate in the consultation on the draft constitution

The Consumer Reference Group (CRG) is excited to announce the release of the draft constitution for consultation. The draft constitution will be the founding document for the new national mental health consumer organisation and has been informed by the experience and expertise of the CRG, MHCA, governance expert, the Scoping Study¹ recommendations and the Australian Government Response². It reflects the governance processes that will support an organisation governed by and for people with lived experience of mental health issues. The document represents a majority of the CRGs work over the last 12 months and a culmination of much time and consideration.

The CRG invites you to provide feedback on the draft constitution. You can provide comment on any aspect of the constitution, or you could choose one or more sections. We are particularly interested in your views on the objects (the aims of the new organisation), membership structure and Board composition. The consultation on the draft constitution will inform the next draft of the constitution and get the new organisation off to the best possible start.

The draft constitution, instructions for providing feedback and the feedback form can be found on the Project website www.mhconsumer.or.au/constitution-consultation

All feedback will be considered before the document is redrafted for the MHCA Board to endorse at its February 2014 meeting. More information on how the consultation feedback will be used can also be found on the website.

You can also support the consultation process by discussing the draft constitution with your members, colleagues and friends, and encourage them to provide feedback.

¹ *Scoping to Inform the Establishment of a New Peak National Mental Health Consumer Health Organisation.* Craze Lateral Solutions. March 2010

² Australian Government Response November 2011

Help name our new organisation

Names are important! A name provides an identity, shapes how others see us and how we see ourselves. The name of an organisation creates a first impression and will help shape it from the beginning.

The Consumer Reference Group recognises that encouraging mental health consumer ownership in the new organisation can be strengthened through broad involvement in the process to find it a name. We will be launching a **naming competition early in 2014**, so over the holiday period start about an inspirational name to help grow the identity of our national mental health consumer organisation.

Perhaps the vision and mission statements will help get the creativity flowing?

Vision: *'Inspiring hope and improving lives together'*

Mission: *'To inspire hope, improve lives and promote mental health and wellbeing through genuine involvement and cultural change, leadership and advocacy.'*

Could you be a Board Director??

Are you interested in taking a leadership role in the future national mental health consumer organisation? With work on constitution almost completed, processes to recruit the inaugural Board are currently being developed.

The draft constitution states that the Board will consist of nine Directors. Three Directors will be individuals and three will be organisational representatives, all these Directors will have lived experience. The final three will be appointed for their skills (e.g. financial management). To ensure that the Board as a whole has the skills and expertise to govern the organisation.

You can find more information on the Board composition in the draft constitution available on the Project website.

The call for Board nominations will go out in the early part of 2014; watch this space!

Would you be a member?

Have you thought about being a member of the new national mental health consumer organisation? As a member it is anticipated that you would participate in processes and activities aimed at influencing mental health reform and building national mental health consumer leadership capacity.

According to the draft constitution membership will be open to individuals with lived experience of mental health issues and organisations who demonstrate commitment to mental health consumers with in structures that might include their own constitution. More information on membership can be found in the draft constitution on the Project website.

A membership drive is planned to start in the early part of 2014; another space to watch!

Adelaide Consumer Reference Group Meeting

The Consumer Reference Group and the Mental Health Council of Australia met in Adelaide, 7-8 November 2013. The priority areas for this meeting included:

- finalising plans for consultation on the constitution
- agreeing on the vision and mission statements as the working definitions:

Vision: *'Inspiring hope and improving lives together'*

Mission: *'To inspire hope, improve lives and promote mental health and wellbeing through genuine involvement and cultural change, leadership and advocacy.'*

- Discussing the impacts of lateral/horizontal violence in the mental health consumer sector and the imperative for new organisation to model respectful communication
- beginning the development of the skills matrix for the inaugural Board
- discussing the nominations process for Directors to the new Board, including the establishment of a nominations committee.

We would like to thank our guests who kindly joined us for an afternoon to network and discuss the future organisation. The Consumer Reference Group received insight and advice from representatives of Mental Health in Multicultural Australia (MHiMA), and the National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum (NMHCCF).

Providing feedback

Thank you for submitting your feedback through our mailbox enquiry@mhconsumer.org.au and through the feedback form on our website. The CRG were provided with copies of all your submissions, and thank you for assisting them in their role. Your comments helped guide our discussion, and were greatly appreciated.

Your constructive, solution focussed feedback is welcomed by the CRG and we look forward to hearing and responding to your thoughts and ideas.

Warmest regards,

Ian Watts

CRG Chairperson

On behalf of all the members of the CRG

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Find us on Facebook

The National Mental Health Consumer Organisation Establishment Project has arrived on Facebook! Take a look, and connect with others who are interested in this important initiative.

Like us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/mhconsumer.org.au>

National Mental Health Consumer Organisation Establishment Project



Strengthening Partnerships for the Future

Consumer Reference Group

Communique

Melbourne, 6-7 March 2014

Consumer Reference Group Meeting

The Consumer Reference Group (CRG) and the Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA) met in Melbourne, 6 March 2014. This was a one day meeting followed by the National Stakeholder Workshop the next day (more details below). Two important outcomes from the meeting were:

Membership fee structure: The CRG will recommend to the MHCA Board that there will be no membership fees for founding members of the new Organisation. The new Board will be responsible for determining the ongoing membership fee structure for the future.

A CEO with lived experience of mental health issues: People from all walks of life in Australia live with the experience of personal mental health issues. The CRG is confident that there are a number of people in the community who have a lived experience of personal mental health issues and who also have the skills and knowledge to make them an outstanding CEO. A number of constitution consultation respondents recommended that the constitution include a requirement that the CEO of the new Organisation have lived experience of mental health issues. Although the CRG members are not aware of another example of this being done in a consumer organisation, they discussed the issue thoroughly and decided that the constitution of the new organisation should include the requirement that 'the CEO of the new Organisation must have lived experience of mental health issues'.

These outcomes will be drafted into the next version of the constitution and provided, with recommendations, to the MHCA Board for final endorsement.

Constitution Consultation: Next steps

Forty people and organisations (including those who took the time to consult with their membership) contributed to the consultation on the draft constitution before the consultation closed on 24 January 2014. The members of the CRG would like to thank everyone who participated for their time and commitment. The volume and depth of feedback strongly demonstrated the commitment from the mental health consumer sector to an organisation governed by mental health consumers for mental health consumers.

Collating and analysing the large volume of feedback has been a priority. The CRG has been working through the issues raised and the redrafting has begun. Our Governance Consultant is providing input on the legal implications of some of changes suggested through the consultation. The CRG is looking forward to reviewing the next draft of the constitution before submitting the proposed constitution to the MHCA Board for endorsement.

It is anticipated that the constitution will be finalised by the end of April 2014.

A separate communique describing the rationale for changes made to the constitution and other decisions will be provided to all those who participated in the consultation.

Other project activities

The constitution redrafting process has resulted in delays in some other important project activities, such as the membership drive, the naming competition and recruitment of the Board.

Would you be a member?

Have you thought about being a member of the new national mental health consumer organisation? We will need foundation members when our organisation begins to operate independently.

As a member it is anticipated that you would participate in processes and activities aimed at influencing mental health reform and building national mental health consumer leadership capacity.

According to the draft constitution, membership will be open to individuals with lived experience of mental health issues and organisations who demonstrate commitment to mental health consumers within structures that might include their own constitution. More information on membership can be found in the draft constitution on the Project website.

A membership drive is planned to start in mid 2014; watch this space!

How will the new Board be recruited?

In an established organisation the membership is usually responsible for electing Board members (Directors).

Because we need a Board of Directors when the new organisation is incorporated (i.e. when it becomes an independent entity) but we don't yet have an established membership, our process for recruiting the first Board members (Directors) of the new Organisation needs to be slightly different to the process used by an established Organisation.

With advice from our Governance Consultant, the CRG agreed that a Nominations Committee would be established to select the first members of the new Board. Members of the Nominations Committee have recently been confirmed, they are:

- Lily Wu Member of the CRG
- Frank Quinlan MHCA CEO (nominated by the MHCA Board)
- David MacKay Assistant Secretary, National Policy and Youth Mental Health Branch, Department of Health (nominated by the Department)

The Nominations Committee will have their first meeting in April to establish the process for ranking expressions of interest for the Director positions and making final decisions.

A call for expressions of interest for Directors will be advertised in April 2014.

Will there still be a competition to name the new organisation?

Yes, the competition to name the new organisation is still going ahead! Please watch this space.

National Mental Health Consumer Stakeholder Workshop

On 7 March 2014, the CRG and the MHCA hosted a National Stakeholder Workshop in Melbourne. The workshop brought together 12 representatives from mental health consumer focused groups, organisations and peaks from across the country, these were:

- NSW Consumer Advisory Group
- Flourish (Tasmania)
- Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council
- Health Consumers Alliance of South Australia
- ACT Mental Health Consumer Network
- Queensland Voice for Mental Health
- Mental Illness Fellowship Australia (National)
- GROW National
- National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum (NMHCCF)
- Mental Health in Multicultural Australia
- Consumers of Mental Health Western Australia
- Private Mental Health Consumer Carer Network (Australia)

These stakeholders brought to the workshop an impressive wealth of knowledge and experience of the mental health consumer sector. Through facilitated workshop activities participants engaged in robust and thoughtful discussion about:

- positioning of the new organisation within the context of the mental health consumer sector
- gaps where the new organisation can support and increase capacity and add value to national mental health reform activity
- areas for engagement and communication
- key work areas for the new organisation in its first 12 months.

Participants also valued the opportunity to share information about the work their organisations are doing and to network. One CRG member reflected that '*this workshop, bringing us all together, could be a first and may have important historical significance*'.

The outcomes of the Workshop will be made available to workshop participants and via the Project website once completed. The Workshop Report, including recommendations, will also be given to the Board of the new Organisation to provide some informed guidance as it makes decisions about strategic directions for the future.

We would like to thank all the Workshop participants for their time and invaluable contributions to the establishment of the new national mental health consumer organisation.

Providing feedback

If you would like to ask a question or provide comment on any part of the Project please email enquiry@mhconsumer.org.au or use the feedback form on our website www.mhconsumer.org.au. The CRG appreciate constructive feedback and are provided with copies at our meetings, we look forward to hearing and responding to your thoughts and ideas.

Warmest regards,

Ian Watts

CRG Chairperson

On behalf of all the members of the CRG

Like to find out more about the CRG?

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Register your interest

Over 500 people have now registered their interest in the NMHCO Establishment Project, are you one of them?

To stay up to date and alerted to opportunities to work with us to develop the new national mental health consumer peak you can register your interest via the Project website www.mhconsumer.org.au.

Contact Us

To contact members of the CRG, or to make a general enquire about the NMHCO Establishment Project please email enquiry@mhconsumer.org.au.

You can also call the Project Manager, Jodie Fisher, at the Mental Health Council Australia on (02) 6285 3100 or email jodie.fisher@mhca.org.au.

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National Mental Health Consumer Organisation Establishment Project

Consumer Reference Group *Communique* Canberra, 18 July 2014

The Consumer Reference Group (CRG) and Mental Health Australia¹ met in Canberra, 18 July 2014. Two important outcomes from our meeting were:

Funding for the next stage of the project

In May 2014, Mental Health Australia submitted a funding proposal to the Department of Health, requesting operational funding for the new organisation after the establishment project is completed. The proposal reflected the original plan to transition the project to an independent and sustainable national mental health consumer peak.

Frank Quinlan, Mental Health Australia CEO, met with the Department of Health just days prior to our meeting in Canberra. The Department advised that a decision about operational funding for the new organisation would be known after the Government considered the outcomes of the *National Review of Mental Health Services and Programmes*. The review is being undertaken by the National Mental Health Commission and is due to report to Government on 30 November 2014.

As preparatory work on the form of the organisation nears completion, there is a risk that the funding uncertainty will have an impact on the achievement of some later project milestones, particularly the recruitment of the new Board and Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The absence of funding could also have a substantial impact on the early operation of the new organisation. The CRG wants to make sure that the national mental health consumer peak stays on the Government's agenda. We are developing a position paper for the National Mental Health Commission highlighting the importance of national level mental health consumer voices and representation. We will strongly encourage the Commission to include recommendations in the Review about structures that ensure the voices of people with lived experience drive mental health reform, including an independent national mental health consumer organisation.

The CRG hopes to put these views directly to the Commission before November. Mental Health Australia is also seeking an extension to the current project end date (30 September 2014), to make sure we are prepared for transition should funding be confirmed.

¹ The Mental Health Council of Australia has recently changed their name to Mental Health Australia.

Finalising the Constitution

The CRG has provided its advice to Mental Health Australia regarding the constitution for the new peak. The CRG is very pleased that it was able to canvass the wide range of important issues in an animated and respectful way.

The most recent recommendations from the CRG to the Mental Health Australia Board included a recommendation that the new peak's constitution include a requirement that the CEO have a lived experience of mental health issues.

Following the CRG meeting, the Mental Health Australia Board gave careful consideration to the recommendations and feedback received from the CRG, including the CRG's recommendation on the composition of the future Board of the mental health consumer peak.² They also considered independent legal and governance advice.

The Mental Health Australia Board decided that on the weight of advice was that it is not good governance for any kind of CEO employment policy to be included in the constitution of an organisation, as such a requirement would constrain the consumer peak's Board from the normal duties of a Board.

Consequently, the Mental Health Australia Board decided that having this requirement in the constitution of the new organisation was not good governance, and our recommendation on this matter was not endorsed.

This decision will leave the new consumer peak Board, comprised in the majority by people with a lived experience of mental illness; free to employ whoever they choose as CEO – lived experience or no lived experience.

The CRG has recommended that the position description for the CEO include having lived experience of mental health issues as an essential selection criterion. The draft position description will be provided to the new Board for its endorsement, and to support its selection of the CEO for the new national mental health consumer organisation. Recruiting their CEO will be one of the most critical decisions the new Board will make, and the final selection criteria for this position is its decision to make.

Plain English User Guide to the Constitution for the new national mental health peak

In response to your feedback on the constitution back in January 2014, we are developing a plain English user guide. Some of you commented that the legal language and structure in the draft constitution was difficult to understand. We found out that it is difficult to rewrite the whole constitution because it is a legal document and important legal terms can't be changed. The User Guide will not be a legal document, but we hope it will help explain some of the complex governance and legal concepts to anyone who might be interested in knowing more about the constitution.

² At least six of the nine Directors will be people with lived experience of mental health issues. The Chairperson will be elected from within the Board membership and must have lived experience.

Other project activities

CRG Working Groups have also been drafting the governance manual, operational policy manual, and models of sustainability for the new organisation. All of these draft documents will be handed over to the new Board (once all the Directors have been recruited) for their endorsement.

Providing feedback

If you would like to ask a question or provide comment on any part of the Project please email enquiry@mhconsumer.org.au or use the feedback form on our website www.mhconsumer.org.au The CRG appreciate constructive feedback and are provided with copies at our meetings, we look forward to hearing and responding to your thoughts and ideas.

Warmest regards,

Ian Watts

CRG Chairperson

On behalf of all the members of the CRG

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National Mental Health Consumer Organisation Establishment Project

Consumer Reference Group

Communique

Canberra, 5-6 February 2015

The Consumer Reference Group (CRG) and Mental Health Australia meeting in Canberra on 5-6 February 2015, was the last time we would meet face to face, signalling the final stage of our journey, which begun back in June 2012. The project phase to establish the new mental health consumer peak organisation will finish at the end of May 2015.

Following the Australian Governments assessment of the Australian Mental Health Commission's Review of *Mental Health Services and Programmes*, we hope to be advised funding will be available to transition the Project to an independent and sustainable organisation as originally planned by the Government in 2012. However, we may not know the decision about ongoing funding until the 2015/16 Budget is announced (May 2015).

A significant amount of our meeting was spent discussing transitioning the project to an independent organisation and longer term sustainability.

Securing funding for your future peak- We need your help!

The future national mental health consumer peak organisation will be governed by and for people with lived experience of mental health issues. Securing funding to operationalise and transition to the national mental health consumer peak is a priority.

In addition to CRG and Mental Health Australia efforts, we urge all people with lived experience, and our supporters, to get behind us to lobby for funding. Contacting your Local Member of Parliament (MP) via a letter, an email or in person is a powerful way of highlighting the importance of the future peak organisation and influencing decision making.

If you would like to make contact with your local MP, we have provided a template letter. You could use the template to mail your MP directly, or use the text in an email (the letter template can be found at this [link](#)).

If you are not sure who your MP is, or how to contact them, visit this website http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Members.

The unique role of the new peak

The CRG agreed the new organisation would have a specialist role in national mental health reform. The new organisation would be uniquely positioned to represent the diverse voices of people with lived experience of mental health issues, providing a coordinated national response to a range of priority mental health reform issues. It could lead innovation in a number of areas, including;

- building and strengthening a network of state and territory mental health consumer peaks and key stakeholders (including the National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum)
- being a centralised point for consumer participation, leadership, engagement and capacity building at the national level
- supporting the development of national standards for the peer workforce and monitor its implementation
- being a one stop shop for information.

The new organisation will be coordinated and led by people with lived experience of mental health issues at every point.

Long term sustainability

The CRG discussed the importance of long term sustainability of the new organisation, noting the first 12 months will be critical as the organisation establishes its operating processes and its place within sector.

Funding options for long term sustainability were considered and will be put to the future Board to consider and action. These options included:

- developing relationships with philanthropic foundations for the purpose of funding future program areas
- developing a broad fundraising strategy to support the work of the organisation
- fee for service, possibly around consumer consultancy activity (such as consumer research).

Closing off the Project

Our work over this final two day meeting also focused on completing a range of project activities. The final product will be a comprehensive handover pack for the future Board, to support the transition process and early operations of the new organisation, and includes;

- the constitution
- draft governance manual
- draft operational policies and procedures
- naming and branding options
- background briefings and recommendations for the future Board's consideration.

The handover pack will provide the foundations for a strong sustainable national mental health consumer organisation governed by and for, people with lived experience of mental health issues.

The CRG will continue to work with the Mental Health Australia project team until the project finishes at the end of May 2015. We will also continue to communicate any developments with you through our Monthly Updates and a final Communique in May.

Our Journey

The Consumer Reference Group's journey has been unique, and we would like to share our individual journeys, our learning and experiences with you. Over the final months of the

Project we will gather our stories and make them available to you on the project website and as part of our final Communique in May 2015.

Providing feedback

We would very much welcome your views and thoughts on securing funding and long term sustainability for the new organisation, and any other part of the project. You can email enquiry@mhconsumer.org.au or use the feedback form on our website www.mhconsumer.org.au

The CRG appreciate constructive feedback and we look forward to hearing from you, and responding to your thoughts and ideas.

Warmest regards,
Ian Watts
CRG Chairperson
On behalf of all the members of the CRG

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National Mental Health Consumer Organisation Establishment Project

Consumer Reference Group Final Communique – June 2015

Colleagues,

This is my last communique to you as chair of the Consumer Reference Group (CRG).

Many of you will know that, in the 2015 federal Budget, the government has redirected the funds that were allocated to the launch of the new organisation by the previous government.

Members of the CRG worked hard to get everything ready for the new organisation. We are profoundly disappointed that the funds are not available for establishment of the new company.

The reality is that if we want our vision to come to life, we can't let it die.

People with a lived experience of mental health issues need to (re)build the case for a national organisation. We need to be utterly clear about the reasons that it **MUST** exist. We need to create the compelling argument for what it, alone, can do. When we are asked what value our organisation brings, we need to be able to explain that clearly to people who don't know much about mental health.

We need to create an army of 'peaceful warriors' who are capable of moving quickly to capitalise on an opportunity to launch our organisation. Many of us know the story of Rosa Parks who acted spontaneously by refusing to give up her seat on a segregated bus. Fewer of us know that she was part of a larger organisation that was setting the scene for change. We can't let this setback destroy the army. It must keep building, and looking for the chance to act.

We need to look for the opportunity to act.

Perhaps that is a small-scale start using crowd-funding. We might face a future in which we alone can do it, though we won't do it alone (to use a phrase from 12-step programs).

Perhaps we can use the uncertainty over mental health funding and the debate that should occur about the future to embed our case.

Perhaps we need to maintain the momentum of the discussion amongst the federal opposition and cross-benches.

I desperately wish I had a clear and indisputable plan. Unfortunately, I don't.

I can only ask you to continue to be involved, and to consider being more vocal and more involved.

We will find a way.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the commitment of the project team at Mental Health Australia.

I wish you well. I hope I hear your voices.

Regards

Ian

Best wishes.

Ian Watts, on behalf of the CRG. ian.watts.au@gmail.com