

PARTICIPATING IN CONSULTATIONS



WHAT IS A CONSULTATION?

Consultation is a broad term that generally refers to providing or gathering information from consumers about a certain topic or issue. For carers, consultations may occur around aspects of the caring role and the impacts of caring, or to involve carers in decision-making processes. Consultations may be a chance to voice your experiences as a carer, and/or share your ideas about how to improve services and supports for carers. Consultations may focus on such topics as understanding more about caring, evaluating current services or working out gaps in services. The services may relate directly to carers, or to the person you care for, or a separate service that impacts on carers (e.g. related to housing, financial, employment support).

WHY SHOULD I BE INVOLVED IN CONSULTATIONS?

Carers are directly impacted by the quality and adequacy of government or organisational policies and programs. Carers can provide unique expertise and practical understanding of the caring role and its impacts, and vital information about services and supports. Consultations are a key means of providing this input. Carers have the right to participate in relevant consultations, and have their role recognised as a service user and/or representative of the person they care for.

WHO CONDUCTS CONSULTATIONS?

All levels of government undertake consultations: federal, state and local (councils). Governments may consult with particular people or groups when they develop new policies or services that will affect those people. Different government departments may consult with carers about policies either targeted at carers, or broader policies that have a significant impact on carers (e.g. changes to housing, disability, financial or employment policies).

Some universities and research groups also consult with carers to gain input into research papers and projects about caring.

Community organisations also consult with carers about services or supports they provide to carers, or that impact upon carers. Some consultations involve

evaluating services that have been provided. Others involve gaining information and input for developing new services, evidencing the need for funding, or to support advocacy targeted at government to improve supports for carers. Such organisations are sometimes carer specific. For example, Carers Australia, our national peak body, consult with carers about some issues at national level. Many consulting organisations are disability, mental health or ageing specific, although other organisations (e.g. health, legal and financial organisations) also consult with carers.

DOES CARERS VICTORIA CONDUCT CONSULTATIONS?

Yes, Carers Victoria consults with carers in several ways. Firstly, we consult with carers about the services and supports we provide. This enables us to review and improve our services and supports. Secondly, we consult with carers about specific government policies, strategies or programs that are being reviewed or proposed. This helps ensure that the responses and submissions we make accurately represent what carers need and want. The policy and research team generally undertake these consultations. Thirdly, we may consult with carers to identify new issues facing carers, or to further understand how certain issues affect carers. This helps us to plan where to focus our research and advocacy.

WHAT TYPES OF CONSULTATIONS OCCUR?

Consultations are often once-off events. Consultations can occur via an individual interview (face-to-face, phone or email), survey or questionnaire (phone or online), focus group (typically face-to-face, under 15 people), or a forum (typically face-to-face, usually 10 or more people). Consultations also occur in a regular or ongoing format, although this is less common. Carers, for example, may be asked to sit on an advisory or reference group for an organisation or government body. This generally requires applying for the position and undertaking an interview, then committing to a minimum level of involvement (e.g. bi-monthly meetings). Carers may also be sought to sit on a steering committee for a particular research project.



HOW CAN I FIND OUT ABOUT WHAT CONSULTATIONS ARE OCCURRING?

Carers Victoria has an electronic monthly newsletter called 'Voice'. You can subscribe and keep an eye out for requests to participate in consultations. If you have a Twitter or Facebook account you can 'follow' or 'like' Carers Victoria. Consultations are also advertised by service providers (disability, mental health, ageing and carer providers), universities, and community houses, libraries and healthcare centres. Advertisements may appear on websites, email, flyers or newsletters. You can ask to be added to mailing lists for key organisations, search relevant websites, and look for notices at community hubs.

You can also ask key organisations whether they consult with carers about key issues, and if so, do they have a register for interested carers.

When government releases news of an inquiry or draft policy, there is often an opportunity for consultation. You can contact the government body to ask about if and how consultation will occur, and how you can be involved. If no consultation is occurring, you could write your own submission (see factsheet on Making a Submission).

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This is general information only. Carers Victoria recommends you read the details of the inquiry carefully so you understand the submission process and related privacy and confidentiality provisions.

CONSULTATION CHECKLIST

SHOULD I PARTICIPATE?

Before agreeing to participate in a consultation, it is worth reviewing the below checklist of key considerations. These help to protect your rights and privacy, and help ensure your time is well spent.

Is the purpose of the consultation clear?

Is this an area I am interested in / can contribute to? Is the time commitment required made clear?

Will there be any follow-up with me after the consultation?

What will be the outcomes of the consultation? Am I satisfied with these proposed outcomes?

Is there someone I can contact if I have a concern or query, or experience distress from the consultation?

Is there a consent form to sign? Does it include the following:

With whom will information I provide be shared?

Where will information I provide will be stored? For how long?

How will information I provide will be published (identifiable, de-identified)?

Can I withdraw at any time during the consultation without penalty? (This is your right in any consultation.)

PREPARING FOR THE CONSULTATION

Do I have some key points that I would like to communicate?

If so, do I have a method to ensure I can cover these points in the consultation (e.g. writing them down and taking them to the consultation)?

AFTER THE CONSULTATION

Did the researchers/organisers follow up as stated?

Is there anything I was dissatisfied with or want to communicate to the researchers/organisers? Have I communicated this to them?

Do I have an unresolved complaint resulting from the consultation? (See factsheet for 'Making a Complaint'.)