

PARTICIPATING IN CONSULTATIONS

WHAT IS A CONSULTATION?

Consultation generally refers to providing or gathering information from community members about services, policies or legislation. Consultations may focus on such topics as caring for people with specific conditions or behaviours, evaluating services or working out gaps in services. The services may relate directly to carers, the person(s) you care for or a separate service that impacts on carers such as housing, education or healthcare.

You can use your experiences as a carer and share your ideas about how to improve services and supports for other carers and people in care relationships.

WHY SHOULD I BE INVOLVED IN CONSULTATIONS?

Families and carers are directly impacted by the quality of government or organisational policies and services. Carers can provide unique expertise of the caring role and its impacts and feedback regarding the adequacy of services and supports they have or would like to receive.

WHO CONDUCTS CONSULTATIONS?

Federal and state governments as well as local councils regularly conduct consultations when they develop or change policies, services or legislation that will affect those people. Governments often employ consultancy companies to conduct consultations and other types of consumer research.

Universities and research institutes also ask carers to participate in research about caring. Universities have specific rules when people in the community contribute to research.

Community organisations also consult with carers about services or supports they provide to carers as their clients or the person(s) for whom they are caring. These consultations can involve:

- Evaluating services that have been provided
- Gaining information and input for developing new services
- Demonstrating the need for funding, or
- As a basis for advocacy to improve supports for carers.

Such organisations are sometimes carer specific; for example, Carers Australia, our national peak body, consults with carers about some issues at a national level such as income support payments.

DOES CARERS VICTORIA CONDUCT CONSULTATIONS?

Yes, Carers Victoria's consultations with carers can be classified into three broad categories:

1. To review and improve the services we deliver directly to carers by asking carers if their needs and expectations were met,
2. To ask about specific government policies, strategies or programs that are being reviewed or proposed, and
3. To further understand how certain issues affect carers. This helps ensure that the submissions we make accurately represent carers' needs and identify emerging issues as well as 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 (phone, print or online), a small focus group (typically face-to-face) or a larger forum. 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 invited to sit on a steering committee for a particular research project.

HOW CAN I FIND OUT ABOUT WHAT CONSULTATIONS ARE OCCURRING?

The best way to find out about current consultations is by reading Carers Victoria's electronic monthly newsletter 'The Voice'. You can subscribe with your email and keep an eye out for requests to participate in consultations or research. 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 organisations with which you are in regular contact whether they consult with carers and whether they have a register for interested participants.

There is often an opportunity for consultation when governments propose new legislation or regulations or Parliaments launch an inquiry into an issue or policy. You can contact the Parliament or government department about their consultation process and how you can be involved. If no consultation is occurring, you could write your own submission (see 'Making a Submission Information Sheet').

CONSULTATION CHECKLIST

Should I participate?

Before agreeing to participate in a consultation, it is worth reviewing this checklist of key considerations. These help to protect your rights and privacy and ensure your time is well spent; however, not all questions will be relevant to the specific consultation you are considering.

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Is the purpose of the consultation clear? | <input type="checkbox"/> Will I be paid for my time or contribution? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Is this an area I am interested in / can contribute to? | <input type="checkbox"/> Are expenses such as transport, respite and/or childcare reimbursed? If the organisers will not cover these expenses, are you able to ask your National Carer Gateway Regional Delivery Partner or Victorian Support for Carers Program provider? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Am I able to request assistance such as an interpreter or hearing loop? | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Is the time commitment required made clear? | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> What will be the outcomes of the consultation? Am I satisfied with these proposed outcomes? | |

CONSULTATION CHECKLIST CONT.

Should I participate? cont.

- Human Research Ethics Committees (HREC) authorise research conducted by Universities or health services such as medical doctors or nurses. There are additional things these researchers must do before community members can participate in research.
- Is there a consent form to sign?
- Have I been provided with a participant information sheet in easy-to-read language? Does it include the approval number or code from the HREC?
- Is there someone I can contact if I have a concern or query, or experience distress from the consultation?
- Will there be any follow-up with me after the consultation?
- With whom will information I provide be shared?
- Where will information I provide be stored? For how long?
- How will information I provide be published (identifiable, de-identified)?
- How can I withdraw from the consultation? (It is your right to withdraw from any consultation without penalty at any time.)

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 like writing them down and taking them to the consultation?
- How can I share my views in a manner which is respectful to the other attendees and the facilitators or organisers?
 - It is vital to think about the emotions related to your experience and if attending a consultation is likely to minimise or exacerbate them. If you intend to discuss experiences which have caused you to feel loss, grief or trauma, you may want to consider professional [carer] counselling in addition to participating in the consultation.
 - Also consider practical matters such as attending the consultation with the person(s) you care for or making arrangements for respite. Are you able to access funding for this?

After the consultation

- Did the researchers or organisers follow up as stated?
- Is there anything I was dissatisfied with or want to communicate to the researchers or organisers? Have I communicated this to them?
- Do I have an unresolved complaint resulting from the consultation? (See 'Making a Complaint Information Sheet')
- Are there any other avenues available to me to share my experience?

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.