



Are you interested in being a Network Board Member but don't know what is expected? Or you just want to know what the Network does?

What do we do? How do we do what we do?

The Network is not a service provider. We are a peak systemic advocacy body promoting self-advocacy and providing for self-advocacy and consumer advocacy training skills.

We respond to government initiated policy and legislation, and promote and guide policy to government. This is predominantly in the formal arena of Consumer Representation on both government and community committees.

We listen to what our members are saying and we oversee what actions are or are not happening in the mental health system in the ACT.

We as mental health consumers need a voice and we also need to be listened to. The mental health system has many flaws, some parts that work well and some parts that are in great need of change. We are often given very little time to respond to mental health policy or proposed legislation so we need to know what is going on and mental health is a huge area that is heavily under-resourced. So at the Network we have a lot of people doing a lot of things for little or no money and sometimes it seems that the legislators and policy writers continue to reinvent the wheel, but often only change the colour.

Being a Network Board Member

The Network is registered under the *Associations Incorporation Act 1991* (ACT), which requires us to have a Constitution that sets out the foundations of what we can do as an Organisation, and how we can do it. The Network is governed by an elected Board comprising 11 members that deals with the oversight and direction of the Network. As a guiding principle for the Network, we have a Constitution that sets out the duties of Board members, what is expected of them and also the general direction the Network can take – Board meetings and Annual General Meetings for example. It also outlines what is expected of a Network member and any steps that

might be needed in case a dispute may arise.

Over the years, many people have applied to become a Network Board member. Many however have never been on a committee before, or may not have been a board member of an incorporated organisation. Newcomers are welcomed at the Network, particularly as ordinary Board members, as we do have returning Board members and the Constitution and policy and procedures in place to provide guidance. Also, there are many places/organisations that the Network can turn to for advice if our processes are unclear.

We have very recently updated our Constitution mainly because it was very outdated – a lot has changed in the years since the former Constitution was written. We also have a lot more funding than when the original Constitution was written and as a consequence, paid staff.

The Network's Funding

The Network receives its primary funding from ACT Health which is administered by ACT Health under a Service Funding Agreement. Each agreement is for a three-year period and is reviewed each year and agreed to by the Network. Every six months the Network has to provide evidence that we are meeting our obligations under the funding agreement. We work well at achieving our goals and obligations and so our funding continues.

We also get other smaller funding grants for projects as and when we can. Our Advocacy and Representation Training course is just one example where we have used additional funding grants to build our program areas.

Having trained Consumer Representatives for many committees, we are able to provide the broad consumer voice to make contributions that will affect in positive ways. We work to bring about changes that are needed to get the system to work with us, rather than harming or distressing us. Lived experience of mental illness can often silence people, who so desperately need a voice.

Many people have asked “Why do we need a Mental Health Consumer Network?” This is because we are the only group of people who use the health system who are subject to mental health legislation. This legislation violates our rights and takes away a lot of the privileges that many others in society take for granted. General health users are able to choose health medications, get second opinions and more importantly; can choose not to take certain medications. If a mental health consumer attempts to refuse treatment they can be brought before a tribunal and forced to comply with involuntary medications and treatments.

Want to know more? Are you just curious? Would like to see our Constitution, look at any policies or understand our funding agreement? Just call the office and make an appointment where we can help answer your questions.