



29 July 2026

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Dear Jena

Review of Mutual Help Meeting Handouts

This letter has been prepared by the ACT Mental Health Consumer Network (the Network) in response to the invitation from Health and Community Services Directorate (HCSD). It incorporates verbal and written feedback received from consumers in relation to the updated Mutual Help Meeting Handouts (the Handouts). The Network welcomes the invitation to provide feedback on the Handouts.

Consumers¹ acknowledged that the Handouts represented a substantial improvement compared with the previous versions and welcomed the clearer language, more accessible layout and greater emphasis on consumer choice and participation. Several areas for further refinement were nevertheless identified.

¹ The Network uses the term 'consumer' because it is the established and widely understood descriptor across ACT legislation, policy frameworks and advisory structures, ensuring clarity and consistency in our systemic advocacy. At the same time, we recognise that people with lived experience do not all identify with the same language, and that terms such as 'people with lived experience' and 'peer' are increasingly used in contemporary contexts were relevant. Our approach is to retain 'consumer' where required for system engagement, while respecting individuals' right to self-identify in the way that best reflects their experience. This supports inclusion, aligns with national lived experience guidance, and maintains the Network's authority and effectiveness within the mental health system.

The overall purpose of the Mutual Help Meetings remained unclear to some consumers. Questions were raised about whether the meetings were intended primarily as a therapeutic intervention supporting recovery; an opportunity for peer support and social connection; a mechanism for providing feedback to staff; or a combination of these functions. It was also noted that consumers often socialise naturally during their inpatient stay, making it important to explain what additional value or purpose the Mutual Help Meetings are intended to provide. Clarification was also sought regarding whether the Handouts were designed for acute inpatient settings, subacute services or other hospital environments, as this would influence expectations about how the meetings operate.

Greater clarity was requested regarding who is responsible for organising, facilitating and following up matters raised during Mutual Help Meetings. Clear information about accountability, including how suggestions or concerns are considered after meetings, was viewed as important for building consumer confidence in the process.

Effective facilitation was identified as essential to the success of the meetings. Appropriate facilitator training was considered important to ensure discussions remain safe, inclusive and meaningful for all participants. The involvement of peer workers was also suggested, with consumers noting that peer support would help provide a more comfortable and recovery-oriented environment.

Although the Handouts provide options for people who do not wish to attend the meetings, consumers suggested that additional information be included about other ways participants can seek support, raise concerns or provide feedback outside the meeting. Consideration was also given to including a simple group agreement or meeting etiquette to establish shared expectations regarding respectful communication, confidentiality and participation.

Feedback from consumers with a First Nations perspective highlighted the absence of culturally specific supports. Consideration was therefore recommended for the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander liaison/peer workers where appropriate. Without these supports, it was suggested that the meetings may not feel culturally safe, engaging or accessible for some First Nations participants.

If you have any questions or require further clarification regarding this feedback, please do not hesitate to contact us on (02) 6230 5796 or executive@actmhc.org.au.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Procedure. We look forward to receiving further consultation requests in future. Consumers value being heard and look forward to seeing how their perspectives are reflected in the final approach.

Yours sincerely



Dalane Drexler
Chief Executive Officer