

## Consumers Representatives - Working with Consumers in NSW Health, Guidelines for Secretariat

**Summary** Provides guidelines for the secretariat of DoH committees to support consumer representatives appointed to committees.

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**Working with Consumers in NSW Health, Guidelines for Secretariat**

The purpose of this circular is to provide guidelines for the secretariat of departmental committees to support consumer representatives appointed to their committee.

NSW Health is committed to involving consumers in decisions made in the health system. Consumer representatives on departmental committees require support so that they can best serve the committee they are appointed to and the community that they represent. The following guidelines provide details on the type of information, resources and additional requirements that consumers need to be valued members of departmental committees.

This circular is supported by Departmental Circular 2003/1 – *NSW Department of Health, Guidelines to Selecting Consumer and Community Representatives*.

Robyn Kruk  
**Director-General**

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Distributed in accordance with circular list(s):

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In accordance with the provisions incorporated in the Accounts and Audit Determination, the Board of Directors, Chief Executive Officers and their equivalents, within a public health organisation, shall be held responsible for ensuring the observance of Departmental policy (including circulars and procedure manuals) as issued by the Minister and the Director-General of the Department of Health.

**WORKING WITH CONSUMERS IN NSW HEALTH  
GUIDELINES FOR SECRETARIAT**

*It is vital that consumer representatives are supported. They play an important role in providing a consumer voice for the whole community. The following is provided to assist you in the secretariat role, to support community and consumer representatives.*

**Information Provision**

The representative requires information on the following issues:

- The committee; its structure, scope of activity, authority and method of operation.
- Terms of Reference.
- Relevant reports and reviews.
- Meeting timetables and procedures; ensure the meeting has been arranged for a convenient time, with adequate notice.
- Location; provide a map which shows the venue for the meeting. Advise the representative of possible ways to get to the venue eg public transport and/or car. Is there car parking available and is it free? In considering a venue, check it has appropriate facilities eg wheelchair access, hearing loop. Security issues may also need to be addressed. Does the consumer need a temporary pass?
- Expected workload; eg reading briefings and minutes, gathering consumers' views on issues, attendance at monthly meetings, reporting.
- Contact lists of other members.
- Who they should contact if they have a concern and how they should make contact. Ensure you also have the representative's contact details and most appropriate method of contact for specific times of day eg is it OK for you to contact them at work?
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It is also suggested that name tags are provided for the first couple of meetings (preferably first names only).

**Distributing Information**

Ensure any written information is up-to-date, relevant and clearly presented and that adequate time is given to consider and respond to the information. Information may need to be provided in alternate formats for people who have difficulty accessing written material eg large print, Braille and audiocassette. The information may also need to be

available in languages other than English. Consumer representatives typically have limited or no access to e-mail and faxes and have to do committee work from home. Assistance may need to be provided to facilitate information distribution, including phone calls and follow up calls, to ensure that information distribution is appropriate and understood.

## **Resources**

It is suggested the following financial assistance be provided to consumer representatives:

- Travel costs; airfares, taxis, kilometre rate for private vehicle or access to health service vehicle.
- Other out of pocket expenses; eg phone calls, photocopying, postage and faxes, copies of articles.
- Expenses for people with disabilities; eg covering carers, special phones, papers in large print.
- Expenses for people with children; eg covering child-sitting fees.

It should be remembered that in comparison with most committee members, consumer representatives have limited resources. It is important to have well documented and understood procedures in relation to what matters are to be the subject of financial assistance and the incurring and claiming of out of pocket expenses. Payments to consumers must be in accordance with departmental policy.

Suggestions to assist in reimbursement include:

- The Department to book and pay for accommodation and travel arrangements. Make sure mode of transport and times of travel and accommodation arrangements are agreed with the consumer representative. Ensure that the representative undertakes the most cost effective mode of travel. Develop a standardised form for committee members to complete for travel reimbursement and assist with its completion if necessary.
- If travel by air, provide for travel to and from consumer's home, to the airport and to and from meeting venue, returning to airport. Cab-charge vouchers may need to be provided (sent in advance of the meeting) along with assistance in how to use them.
- Provide a supply of expense claim forms eg mileage allowance and reply paid envelopes at beginning of duties. Alternatively ensure a supply of forms at meetings allowing for completion and return on the same day.
- Ring consumer representatives back if they call you, so they do not pay for the call.

## **Other Support Required**

Often consumer representatives lack adequate support or are isolated. The secretariat for each group should discuss ideas with the consumer representative on how they can best offer support.

## **Communicating with Consumers**

- After each meeting contact the consumer to see if there are any issues arising from the meeting that they need explained.
- Limit the use of acronyms (and provide a list and explanation of acronyms).
- Speak in plain English and ask the consumer representative if they would like further explanation.

## **Additional Information**

For Ministerial Committees there are Premier's Department guidelines that are applicable, these are *Guidelines for Board and Committee Members' Appointment & Remuneration* and *Conduct Guidelines for Members of NSW Government Boards & Committees*. These guidelines are available on the Premier's Department website [www.premiers.nsw.gov.au](http://www.premiers.nsw.gov.au).

Further information about consumer remuneration and support can be obtained from:

The Consumer and Community Participation Unit (CCPU)  
Consumer and Community Development Branch  
E-mail: [ccdev@doh.health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:ccdev@doh.health.nsw.gov.au).  
Phone: 9391 9815