



## **INTERIM POSITION STATEMENT**

### **PAYING AND REIMBURSING CONSUMERS, CARERS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO PARTICIPATE**

**Adopted May 2008**

**Revise June 2009**

## Health Issues Centre

Health Issues Centre is an Australian independent health policy, research and action centre that has been promoting the consumer perspective in health care for 22 years. It has a Board of Management and eleven members of staff. It is based at La Trobe University in Bundoora, Victoria.

Health Issue Centre's work is centred on four main streams: policy analysis and advocacy from consumer and equity perspectives; consumer-focused research; supporting consumer participation; and providing information. It works with governments at all levels, health services, universities and consumers, carers and community members to achieve its vision.

## Consumer participation

Health Issues Centre works to ensure the views of consumers, carers and community members are heard and included in the design and delivery of health services and in the development of health policy in Victoria and Australia.

Health Issues Centre believes individuals who use health services or who care for individuals using health services are well-placed to offer feedback, advice and expertise as to how services can be improved, where services should be located and how services and policies should be designed. Health Issues Centre also encourages community members with an interest in promoting health to contribute their views and perspectives to health policy and planning initiatives.

## Definitions

Health Issues Centre uses the following terms in this position statement:

<b>Consumers:</b>	People who are current or potential users of health services
<b>Carers:</b>	People providing unpaid care to a family members or friends
<b>Communities:</b>	Groups of people who have an interest in the development of an accessible, effective and efficient health and aged care service (Department of Human Services 2006).

## Position statement

This position statement has been written for health services and health policy organisations that are planning to involve consumers, carers and community members in a range of participation approaches. Common participation approaches include focus groups, committees, workshops and presentations.

This position statement does not cover community development initiatives where community members are directly involved in improving their own health outcomes.

**Health Issues Centre recommends that organisations which invite consumers, carers and community members to have input into the planning of services and programs should offer consumers a suitable payment for their contribution and reimburse all of their out-of-pocket expenses associated with their participation.**

In addition, Health Issues Centre recommends that organisations consider a range of mechanisms for supporting the ongoing contribution of consumers, carers and community members. Such mechanisms could include sponsorships for attendance at conferences or workshops, or access to information or training.

To prepare for these costs, organisations should make an allocation for consumer payments and reimbursements in their annual budgets.

## Process for payment and reimbursement

Health Issues Centre recommends the following processes be undertaken by health services and health policy institutions when implementing consumer and community participation:

1. Reimburse all out-of-pocket expenses associated with the participation of consumers, carers and community members; for example, transport costs, parking, printing of documents and childcare.
2. Pay all consumers, carers and community members a sitting fee or one-off payment to reflect their experience and expertise, along with the time taken to prepare for and attend meetings.
3. Support consumers, carers and community members to attend workshops, conferences and forums where they can enhance their knowledge, learn new skills and build connections with other consumers and organisations.
4. Allocate a staff member to the role of administering the reimbursement and payment processes, to ensure payment is made promptly. Ensure that, at the commencement of their involvement, consumers, carers and community members are informed of the name and contact details of this staff member.

## Payment schedule

Health Issues Centre offers the following amounts for consideration. Organisations should negotiate payment on a case-by-case basis. Payment should be paid to consumers, carers or community members as sitting fees or one-off payments. These amounts are current as of May 2008. All rates are per hour.

Role	Government	Non-government organisations	Small community-based organisation
Contributing to a focus group	\$40–\$60	\$30–\$50	\$20
Participating in a consultation workshop	\$30–\$60	\$20–\$50	\$20
Delivering a presentation at a workshop	\$100–\$120	\$80–\$100	\$50
Delivering a presentation at a conference or forum	\$120–\$150	\$100–\$120	\$50
Participating in a statewide or regional advisory committee	\$45–\$65	\$35–\$55	\$30
Reviewing documents	\$40–\$50	\$30–\$40	\$20
Participating as a panel member at a conference	\$65–\$85	\$55–\$65	\$35

## Reimbursement

In addition to payment, Health Issues Centre recommends organisations reimburse all of the following out-of-pocket expenses that are associated with the participation of consumers, carers and community members:

- Parking
- Childcare
- Travel expenses
- Printing costs.

Appropriate forms and information on the process for completing the forms should be sent to consumers, carers and community members prior to their first engagement.

## Case study

Debbie expressed an interest in participating on the Wombat Hospital Community Advisory Committee. She felt she had the knowledge and experience to make a contribution and help improve services for others. She was also very grateful to the staff for helping her through her illness and treatment and wanted to volunteer her time. Debbie was advised by the hospital that she would be reimbursed for any out-of-pocket expenses. She did not have a car and lived a long distance away from the train station. She was advised that she could catch a taxi to the meetings and then be reimbursed.

Debbie arrived by taxi to her first meeting and gave the receipt to the committee convener, expecting to be reimbursed straight away. It was explained to her that a request would need to be presented to finance and that she would then be reimbursed via a direct debit transfer. By the time the next meeting came around Debbie had still not received any reimbursement. Since her illness, Debbie had been struggling financially and could not find the money to pay for the taxi out of her own pocket.

Debbie only attended two more meetings at the hospital before stopping. She was embarrassed to speak to anyone about her financial situation and could no longer afford the taxi trips. The committee convener finally contacted her to see why she had stopped attending meetings and Debbie explained her situation. The hospital promptly arranged for Debbie to be given 12 taxi vouchers to use to attend the meetings and reimbursed other expenses incurred by her when attending meetings.

## Good practice

- Payment and reimbursement arrangements should be in place prior to involving consumers, carers and community members.
- Payment and reimbursement arrangements should be explained to consumers, carers and community members prior to their participation.
- All consumers, carers and community members should be given the option to accept or reject such payments or to choose for their payment to be given to a charity or organisation of their choice. This discussion should be done on an individual basis and should be confidential.
- Some consumers, carers or community members prefer payment for travel expenses prior to attending the meeting or activity; for example, a taxi voucher or Metcard. Organisations should contact consumers prior to their involvement to arrange appropriate reimbursement methods.
- Payment and reimbursements need to be made promptly. Consumers, carers and community members should not have to follow up with the organisation on their outstanding reimbursement and payment.

## Case study

The Australian Institute of Public Hospitals organised a consultation with consumers to seek their input into the Institute's new strategic planning process. They invited 20 consumers from peak consumer health organisations to attend. Consumers were required to contact the Institute to register. Following their registration, the Institute sent all consumers an information pack, which, among other things, explained:

- The types of out-of-pocket expenses that would be paid (parking, childcare)
- Details of the sitting fee to be offered and details on how to accept or decline this fee
- The process and timelines for claiming any out of pocket expenses and the sitting fee
- Parking instructions
- A contact name and phone number for any questions.

## Additional notes

At times, taxation laws, individual circumstances or personal preferences may mean that organisations need to be flexible in the way they financially reimburse consumers.

If payment is an issue for consumers it may be suitable to consider other options such as vouchers.

Payments below \$50 per meeting are generally accepted by Centrelink as not affecting any social security benefits and do not incur GST. This information will vary depending on circumstance and should be tailored to the needs of the individual.

Some organisations can only pay consumers if they register with the Human Resources Department to become employees. Generally consumers do not prefer this option due to perceived conflict of interest.

Health Issues Centre suggests that organisations discuss payment and reimbursement arrangements with each consumer and come to a suitable agreement.

## Reference

Department of Human Services (2006). *Doing it with us and not for us. Participation in your health service system 2006-09: Victorian consumers, carers and the community working together with their health services and the Department of Human Services*. Rural and Regional Health and Aged Care Services Division, Victorian Government Department of Human Services.

## Additional information

1. Department of Human Services taxation compliance: Committee members and withholding tax - August 2004. Accessed on 30 November 2007 from <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/consumer/pubs/tax.htm>
2. Christine Walker and Margaret Wohlers (2001). A Model of Payment to Consumers, Carers and Community Representatives. Published in Health Issues, No. 68, September 2001, pp.18-20.
3. Australian Government (2005). Principles for the Appointment of Consumer Representatives. Accessed 30 November 2007 from [www.treasury.gov.au/contentitem.asp?NavId=014&ContentID=994](http://www.treasury.gov.au/contentitem.asp?NavId=014&ContentID=994)
4. Australian Government (2007). Remuneration and Allowances for Holders of Part-Time Public Office. Accessed 30 November 2007 from [www.remtribunal.gov.au/partTimeOffices/currentDetermination/default.asp](http://www.remtribunal.gov.au/partTimeOffices/currentDetermination/default.asp)

## Health Issues Centre

Health Issues Centre is an Australian independent health policy, research and action centre that has been promoting consumer perspectives in the Australian health system since 1985. Its mission is to improve the health outcomes for Australians, especially those who are disadvantaged. It works with a wide range of consumers, health providers, researchers, governments and other health organisations to achieve this through:

- **Policy analysis and advocacy from consumer and equity perspectives**
- **Consumer-focused research**
- **Promoting and supporting consumer participation**
- **Disseminating information.**

Health Issues Centre offers a range of programs and services for individuals, health services and government departments. Simply, let us know how you would like to participate in our programs and services.

- Receive information on how to recruit and support consumers/carers for projects and committees
- Obtain support to develop, implement and evaluate consumer participation
- Organise a guest speaker
- Discuss a research opportunity or commission research with us
- Discuss a possible consultancy project around consumer participation
- Become a member of Health Issues Centre
- Subscribe to Health Issues Journal
- Receive *eNews*, a monthly electronic news bulletin
- Receive information on training and events
- Discuss the possibility of organising tailored training to meet the needs of your organisation

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