



What consumers said about Committee Positions?

Health Issues Centre with funding from the Victorian Department of Human Services maintains a register of over 200 consumers. As positions for consumers on committees are received HIC recruits and support consumers to participate. Recently HIC has been unable to fill some positions. HIC decided to find out from consumer why they had not been applying in the interest of quality improvement for both the consumers and committees who are trying to recruit.

The main reasons consumers gave a listed below, also below are the responses provided by the consumers.

- OVERCOMMITTED
- NOT ENOUGH TIME TO PUT IN AN APPLICATION
- DISILLUSIONED BY THE COMMITTEE PROCESS
- TOO FAR FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE RURAL CONSUMERS
- CARER RESPONSIBILITIES
- POOR HEALTH
- FINANCIAL REASONS

Committee names, geographical location and any identifying information has been deleted.

Replies

Consumer 1

From my point of view I live near which a 3.5 hour drive to Melbourne and I work a 32 hour week so getting to Melbourne to participate is not easy, perhaps if you sought out more rural or regional towns needing CAC or committee members you would draw a bigger interest.....and yes I think people get over whelmed with work commitments and have to priorities what is important to them.

Consumer 2

I think you are doing a great job and I am glad I have found out about your organisation. As for myself, I am focusing on the area of mental health and am waiting for a response from about my application for a position on their council. I am also a community member of the Mental Health Review Board so I will limit myself to these 2 endeavors for the time being.

Consumer 3

For my part my connection with HIC came about as I undertook becoming a consumer type member of a committee, rather than as a person looking for a new committee. At this early stage of my involvement I think one is enough for me - I don't want to be a 'professional consumer' and I have a feeling that the committee should be related to an area of interest or consumer's own use. Maybe in time I will feel I have more to give and will see something that calls to me irresistibly. I'm really not sure how you reach a potential pool of consumer committee reps. I think for the general public it is a largely unknown role/possibility. Just say the word (and maybe give me a script) and I'll promote it to my circle of acquaintance and family.

Consumer 4

I looked at these committee positions and felt that

- a. they were too far from and
- b. they were positions that dealt with subject matter about which I know nothing and was not really interested in

Consumer 5

I believe that many of us are already contributing and feel that we cannot contribute any more. Maybe a new recruitment drive is necessary?

Consumer 6

I've applied before but was rejected presumably because I was not regarded as a "proper" consumer.

Consumer 7

Sometimes there is not enough warning for committees. I think that you are competing against CHF which makes it hard too

Consumer 8

I'm on four committees and that's enough for me

Consumer 9

I personally pass on the information to the internet lists I run and there are many names on these lists. For me, I am already on many committees/Boards and do a lot more that is hidden with in these committees plus other things as well. I am supposed to spend a limit of around 34 hrs per month instead I seem to putting in around 4-6 hrs per day at least 6 days per week, and I am starting to 'burn out' over it. I will be looking to cut down soon and then looking to satisfy my interest in 'blogging' over the internet. However, not there yet and will keep sending to the internet lists to make sure others are on the same page - information wise. I am assuming that something like this was amongst the reasons the Health Issues Centre was started in the first place

Consumer 10

I suppose I could fit into the 2nd last category all committed out, one could do more, but at a cost and I don't think I should do any more. The answer would be having more participants and then the more experienced people could move upwards to the top so to speak and fill some of the harder content committee's.

Consumer 11

Too busy - plus I often find there isn't a lot of info with the requests particularly around time commitment etc

Consumer 12

Have applied over the last couple months to a couple with no response from the organisations...really annoying. Have found the application process somewhat lengthy and "over the top", like going for an Executive position!

Consumer 13

Still believe consumers are not given sufficient reimbursement for the effort involved.

Consumer 14

Most of the time I can't get the website to open up, it is frustrating and stops me from trying to do so on other occasions.

Consumer 15

Although I can not 'speak' for anyone else, here is my reason why I can't take up any position on ANY committee;

* I am just too busy to even 'think' about taking on another commitment.

Being a carer for 2 people (one terminal) is more than a full time job and when I do manage to find time for MYSELF.... I need it physically and mentally. Being on a committee would reduce my personal relaxation time.

Consumer 16

I'm already on aCommittee as a volunteer (CAG). I also educate the masses between Mornington and Sorrento. It may be that we have been getting a great catch of great southern calamari in recent months. This may be the reason why participants from the Mornington Peninsula have not been as active as they could be re: consumer positions.

Consumer 17

1. *Do we need to find more interesting committees and if so what type of committees, areas etc?*

I think the committees are interesting with a wide range of aspects needed to be tackled, assessed and be contributed from the consumer's point of view.

2. *Do people feel reluctant to participate on some committees and if so why?*

Perhaps some people may see it as being "too pushy" if one is serving on more than couple of committees.

3. *Is our application process to complicated?*

I believe it is too complicated. Simplicity would definitely bring me to the table.

4. *Do people want more information about the committees?*

Or is it just because everyone is busy and all "committed" out?

Or is there any other reasons?

I think that more information in way of what is expected from the members would be beneficial. In most cases this information is there, perhaps emphasis the requirements a bit more.

Other reasons like – too busy, too many committees, etc. – are all excuses. If someone want to do so – it is a matter of priorities.

Consumer 18

I have expressed an interest a few times and got no feedback whatsoever, so my interest has dropped off as a result.

Consumer 19

1. *Do we need to find more interesting committees and if so what type of committees, areas etc?*

Yes. Eg. Anything to do with the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

2. *Do people feel reluctant to participate on some committees and if so why?*

For me as I'm sure as for most people, the committee has to be an area that I am particularly interested/passionate about.

3. *Is our application process to complicated?*

No it's simple.

4. *Do people want more information about the committees?*

I think the information given is quite adequate and if we require more info all we need do is ask.

5. *Or is it just because everyone is busy and all "committed" out?*
Maybe, but again if it is a committee I am passionate about I would put up my hand to join.

6. *Or is there any other reasons?*

Consumer 20

I've been a bit quiet in the 'committee arena' the last couple of months due to a relationship breakdown and living with the 24hour threat of fire for several weeks took over life for a while, we had to evacuate a few times. I am leaving for the USA with my son, I am working with him as a research assistant on anti-gravity. When I return on April 17th I anticipate my enthusiasm and motivation for committees will have returned.

Consumer 21

Sometimes for me the closing dates for applications simply aren't long enough, sometimes they don't sound like they're my kind of thing, and with regards to the latest ones advertised it sounded like I needed to be 'old' with the use of the term 'senior'.

I personally would like longer to submit an application if I was interested in applying for a particular committee, and if they're an existing committee - I'd like to know when they meet ie day/time and what the reimbursement will be - not just that there will be reimbursement or no mention of it at all.

Consumer 22

Just a time issue for me. If it doesn't look like helping the people I represent, then it's not time efficient.

Consumer 23

Do we need to find more interesting committees and if so what type of committees, areas etc? I believe that the positions available are looking for particular skills - and perhaps this is not why people are showing an interest. Perhaps if it was made clear what skills/expertise the consumer needs to have may help.

Do people feel reluctant to participate on some committees and if so why? not at all - but need to know that I am going to be able to contribute something.

Is our application process too complicated? that has not been my experience to date
Do people want more information about the committees? Probably would help.
Something more specific on what is required of consumer

Or is it just because everyone is busy and all "committed" out? I guess some people are but I am sure many are not. Perhaps there are more like me and just a little unsure of what is expected skills/expertise wise

Consumer 24

I think it is because every one are busy and already committed, sorry, Cheers

Consumer 25

I know I'm not the most frequent correspondent but I thought I should drop you a line in the hope that, taken together with the other responses you might get, might assist you in forming some view in relation to the questions you posed in your last email.

For myself, even though I'm officially retired, I find that I have too much on my plate to go on to another committee.

You may know that I'm on 2 committees already and I'm also on another committee of a not-for profit organisation in the Greek community. I also find it necessary to do some paid work, thanks to the "global financial crisis".

Taken together the above activities are more than I can cope for at this stage.

I hope the above adds something towards your understanding as to the poor interest/enthusiasm for nominating for the committees you have brought to our attention.

If you are tabulating the responses, I would be very interested in receiving some feedback as I suspect there will be many others in situations similar to mine.

Consumer 26

I am theoretically interested in applying for a consumer position, but haven't done so for various reasons, mostly reluctance to become over-committed at present. Also, many of the position seem to call for specific knowledge or awareness that I don't have e.g. I wouldn't apply for infection control, or similar specific committee, because I don't have any specialised knowledge of these processes. Also, I haven't prepared a relevant C.V., but guess I would do this if sufficiently motivated. I was very interested in the three Principal committees of the National Medical and Research council, but there is no information regarding the actual requirements of the consumer position e.g. Where & when does it meet/how frequently/what prior knowledge is required/what commitment i.e. preparation and learning would be required/etc.

Consumer 27

I don't want to take the time to prepare an application without knowing more about it.

Consumer 28

For me at the moment it is a personal one, it is not the committees or anything to do with that. It is more time management and trying to juggle heaps of different balls all at the same time. It is trying to find "me time" as well.

My elderly 87year old mother is getting increasingly frail with more and more complex health needs. I'm the eldest of 2 children and my brother lives in Canberra. Therefore I get all the mother stuff to do.

Consumer 29

I work part-time and have workplace issues that are ongoing and very difficult to cope with. I work in the health sector so you will have some idea of the complicated thing that is!!

Along with that I have a few of my own health issues to manage and a husband of 24 years who needs have to be considered too.

Up until mid last year I was heavily involved in lots of committees (I think I was on about 6-7 different things at the time) but decided I needed to cut back for a while, mainly because every time a meeting would come around there would be a new crisis with mum and I wouldn't get there, I felt very guilty about my non attendance.

Also my husband was starting to feel a bit left out as I was out several nights a week.

That's a brief summary of my immediate issues but looking at the broader picture I just think we are all feeling very weary after the recent bushfires, maybe some consumers are having to deal with difficult things there. I've had relatives involved

in the bushfire areas with only minor damage to property but others may have experienced more severe losses and need to time to deal with that. Collectively I think the whole of Victoria is in a state of shock and we are only slowly coming to terms with all the horrible things that happened.

Other questions to ask would be what is the average age of the people involved in committees. Most would be middle aged or older?. Young people on the whole lead busy lives so would be less available. Maybe attracting young people into the mix could be looked at.

On all the groups I've been involved in locally it is the same core group that gets involved in everything, so the pool of resources is limited anyway.

Consumer 30

Too many committees for me and job + health not the best at the moment.

Consumer 31

Guess for me there are two key reasons why I don't nominate.

The first is time and the ability to commit to a position, given existing CAC, work and life commitments. An important element within this constraint is also the time and location the particular committee meets and further detail on these aspects would be welcomed when reviewing such positions.

The second factor is one of information of both the position/committee and the expectations of the consumer nominee.

Whilst some of the more medical positions may be of interest (say the DHS infection control committee for example), I am unlikely to have detailed knowledge on the topic and consequently have some unease/uncertainty about the expectations of the consumer nominee on such "clinical" "medical" committees. As a consequence, I end up assuming that there will be some "consumer" out there who has a greater degree of knowledge in the particular field who will nominate.

Consumer 32

I can only speak for myself but there are a number of reasons I do not apply for positions. I now live indo not drive so unless it is something I am really passionate about I won't travel. I do not agree with the definition of Consumer. I need to know something about the Illness, procedure etc or I feel I can not truly represent a consumer opinion.

Consumer 33

With regards to your email, I thought that it would be appropriate to provide you with my own personal perspective.

I have been a full-timer Carer for my father for some six years, but do make time to be actively involved in community work.

I believe that I would fall under your "all committed out" category.

Some of my current community activities include:
(This consumer listed 7 committees)

Whilst all of the above activities that I am passionately involved with are on a voluntary basis, I am thankful that I can receive some respite to attend same.

Hope this gives you a better insight to my personal community involvement.

Consumer 34

It is very important that you have approached us on this rather important issue....I can only speak for myself here....I would say the prime reason would be for me in applying on these vacancies would be that I have been very busy with the work that I am doing currently.

However I do pass the vacancies in which you do provide to me via email...to various interesting Consumers and I guess it is rather up to them to process their interest further.....I must say Assunta it is rather difficult to get their interest.....perhaps if you could highlight the benefits they would gain in being committed to the advertised Committee.....and maybe even simplifying the process.....though I know that your people are truly doing an amazing effort in getting people on board and I guess that there are many benefits to getting people on board in many ways.

Perhaps if you were to have an interested consumer voice their gains for contributing to belonging to some of the various Committees.....and how they can access the website information that you mentioned of the advertised positions.

The process needs to be well marketed.....please do not consider this as "you do not market the process well" I think that you do an extraordinary job though there is always room for improvement.

I hope that what I have imparted to you may be utilized effectively with the other comments which will come to you as well.

Consumer 35

Assunta, Just too busy to take on much else!! I want to be on committees that extend my thinking and require 'real' involvement. Often need to know how long the committee is to go for, time of meetings, frequency of meetings, and type of consumer input required, any travel, any 'costs' involved, and any probity checks required...

Consumer 36

1. I had applied for a few previously that would have been a good fit, but other people were chosen.

2. In the same category, of doing work (preparing resumes etc etc) with no result, is that so very many of them never have the courtesy of letting me know if it's a 'no', so I'm hanging about, not knowing whether I should seek to fill that slot of my availability elsewhere.

3. In the meantime, having done a year with the and 6 months with thethere, and finding they both required a lot of reading, responding etc to paperwork (and at the same time I'd had many family and other matters come up after the death of my ex-husband - plus more illness) I'd run out of puff entirely by the end of the year.

4. At this moment the looks like going into recess for a while, while they wait for their next lot of financing.

So at this time I've had to decide not to put up my hand for any more, so I can give due attention to the CAC - and also, between you and me, I simply have to give more time to trying to make myself some money - and for the type of work I do, that requires a great deal of time and effort and thought.

5. A few of the latest one simply hasn't been a good fit for me.

Consumer 37

For me at the moment I am fully committed - can't be part of any more just now.

Consumer 38

In reply to you asking why no-one have applied for the committee positions you have mentioned, in my case as I am already on two committees withinI feel this is enough and could not do justice to being on another one.

However, I very much appreciate being on your mailing list and receiving your weekly newsletters and information.

Consumer 39

Hope you've been well. I'm sorry to hear that volunteers have been hard to come by recently. My guess is that people are not sure what to expect on the committees. The information sheets provide some background, but remain quite general.

I am interested in the one on Infection Control, but have been hesitant because I don't have much knowledge/experience of health services so far.

Consumer 40

Hi Assunta, I have indicated my interest in 2 positions.

Consumer 41

Some feedback for you I still believe it is a matter of consumers feeling wary of applying not sure if they will be successful or not. I believe a good way would be for the Community Engagement Co-ordinators to speak with their consumers and then recommend directly people to you, time willing of course.

Consumer 42

Sorry you seem to be having trouble getting interest in committee membership. I think part of the reason may be that most of your 150 members are already on at least one committee.

I am a member of CAC and also on two of their subcommittees as well as the Committee. Some of the recent vacancies have I think been outside of my areas of expertise and therefore I have not felt able to even consider putting in an application. I might be able to become involved in really grass roots areas but some of the recent vacancies seem to have been a bit complicated. Also if there are short terms projects some people might have an opportunity to participate.

Consumer 43

At this point in time I am fully committed—I sit on a committee, 3 sub-committees and 2 work groups. I am also attempting to mentor 3 new consumer reps on the sub-committees. Some months ago I resigned from chairing theconsumer participation committees of the peak NGO in this area of health provision due to the impossibility of doing justice to these commitments as well as run my practice and be a half OK partner for my wife. Mind you I have been sorely tempted by some of these committees.

Consumer 44

I probably would have preferred to ring you and have a chat but I haven't been at my desk during the day. In a sense all the reasons that you list could/might have impacted in one way or another. For example I was going to put my hand up for the one on 'infection' but the thought of filling in that form at that point in time stopped me from doing it and other reasons of course!! In the past Lauren used an expression of interest which I had sent her which had all the relevant information which helped her decide. I think you are quite right in raising these questions and maybe we as consumers/carers could look at what needs to be considered in terms

of why and how can consumer responses to 'positions' be improved. I hope that my comments are useful even though they are brief and I would be happy to speak to you but it would have to be next week.

Consumer 45

For me, it's nothing to do with lack of interesting committees or application forms. Rather, it is all about place & time (and on occasions recompense) for meetings. The one is out because I do not live in the required municipalities (plus I do not use their health services, so it doesn't make sense to apply anyway). The Infection Control one doesn't say which day the meetings are so I can't commit in the event it is a work day. The Clinical Practice Committee starts at 8am on Fridays which is impossible when you have to take a primary school student to school at around 8.45am- and then travel 35 kms.

Early morning meetings really mean you can only get consumers who are retired, financially well off, well enough not to have to work, in a management position where they can set their own hours, and/or live close by to the venue. They are certainly not designed for mothers with children.

Where I live, although in Metro Melbourne, is around 47 kms from the city so getting somewhere is a major exercise?

Consumer 46

My excuse is the time of day, as I work full time and am unable to attend seminars meetings etc, during day work hours, but am interested in helping out as discussed when we met

Consumer 47

Very briefly: the two main reasons that I have not taken up any Consumer positions as yet are that I haven't seen anything that fits with what I am looking for – something related to being a parent of a child with a (mild physical) disability and, of course, lack of time...

Consumer 48

I like to help out where I can but need to balance things with family commitments andAssociation work. The latter is time consuming as I am the President and we are having difficulty getting voluntary admin support so in the meantime I am covering some aspects of this. As you are aware I am also on the so I am doing my share of voluntary work. I receive sitting fees for my bi-monthly attendance at and the where recent meetings are frequently cancelled.

I don't apply for Committee work where I feel my experience is not relevant. I don't think your processes are too complicated nor the information provided inadequate. Perhaps you might maintain a reference panel of experienced Committee Members where you could "headhunt" if you don't receive sufficient responses.

I would be interested in the following my recent emergency surgery. Your emails provide good info re vacancies though I think the website button "Consumer Information" may have the words "including committee vacancies" added for user friendliness - just a thought.

Consumer 49

Hi Assunta, Am already on a committee as a consumer where I live as well as many other commitments, and living way out from the city.

Consumer 50

I have been very busy lately with and a paper I have now submitted to the so I have been very picky about what I get interested in (of course, I always was!!).

I had a good look at theconsumer position and, prompted by your email, I investigated further. I was interested position However, it all got to be too hard – too many hurdles!

They wanted a senior consumer. Access could not be gained without a password etc. I was very wary of applying to an position anyway as it could possibly conflict with my activity with, but I overcame that to see what they wanted. I tried an email to enquiries, but have had no response yet.

The way I see it, a brief CV should suffice to get onto some sort of short list for a position without going through all the seemingly bureaucratic hoops.

I have also seen this with other positions I have been interested in, but didn't apply for eventually for the same reason.

Many of the recent positions have been for very specific topics, so I have excluded myself from them on the basis of no immediate first hand knowledge.

I am at a bit of a loose end right now though. I am still involved at on an on-going research project and another that is just starting, the Committee, and the Group, but nothing that is really time demanding, until the judging starts. If you see any projects that you think might interest me, I would be happy to have a look at them.

Consumer 51

Sorry about taking so long to respond to this, got really busy with other Consumer Participation work and my paid work in my small business which sadly has to take priority over everything else as this brings me my livelihood.

1. *Do we need to find more interesting committees and if so what type of committees, areas etc?*

Not really, I think the requests coming in are very interesting

2. *Do people feel reluctant to participate on some committees and if so why?*

I think most consumers would participate only on those committee that they have personal interest in. I would never participate just for the sake of participation nor will I participate if there isn't a job description/duty statement (call it what you like) to clarify the position being applied for

3. *Is our application process too complicated?*

Nope I think HIC has an excellent application process.

4. *Do people want more information about the committees?*

That always help, a fact sheet about the Committee and how it fits in the organisation. A brief overview of the organisation itself. Perhaps a web site for it so we can read on it before deciding

5. *Or is it just because everyone is busy and all "committed" out?*

Most consumers I know are flat out not only with consumer representation but other work

6. *Or is there any other reasons?*

Like every thing else in life, it is likely to ebb and flow, possibly at the moment it is in the ebb part.

Consumer 52

The main reason for not going on most of these committees for me is the location of most of them- it is quite time consuming to travel to the city and back for me. Also I do have other commitments and other voluntary work I am involved with so time is a factor.

Consumer 53

My response on the consumer issue is that I have to be very focused on what I would join as a consumer. My current consumer and volunteer activities take up a fair amount of time at present so that I have to leave sufficient remainder for doctor appointments, treatment and rest so my health is up to honoring the commitments I have.

So to put it succinctly, my chronic health complaint (advanced cancer) determines how many committees I can join.

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