

## Toolkit Resource:

### Considering community engagement in public policy

'Above all, action must be driven and owned by women – proactive participation and increased engagement in prevention, self-care and health care will drive the most rapid improvements in health outcomes for all women and girls in Australia.'

- National Women's Health Strategy 2020-2030 on Strengthening Partnerships

#### Background

This document contains considerations to integrate meaningful community engagement processes when developing policy or advocating for policy reform. It includes content for government audiences, non-government organisations including health peak bodies and advocacy groups, as well as individuals and community members.

Public policy works best when designed with community and lived experience in mind. Effective engagement helps policy be more responsive to community needs, strengthens trust between governments, organisations, and communities, and empowers people to shape the environments that impact their health and lives. (World Health Organization, 2021)

#### The important role of community engagement in public policy

- Governments are responsible for consulting with the broader community throughout a policy's development to discuss and explore potential impacts of future directions.
- Community members and interested groups such as peak bodies, advocacy groups, lived experience advocates, research and educational institutions and various non-government organisations play a vital role in shaping, influencing and implementing public policy.

Gender-responsive approaches to community engagement are important to design policies that meet the needs of priority populations of women and gender diverse people. Embedding diverse community voices throughout the policy cycle, especially those with lived experience, will support governments and organisations to implement policies that are more responsive, inclusive and effective.



## Considerations

<b>Governments</b>	<b>Considerations</b>
<p><b>Mechanisms</b> What mechanisms exist for communities to inform:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• issues raised</li> <li>• policy analysis</li> <li>• policy instruments</li> <li>• coordination</li> <li>• decision-making</li> <li>• implementation</li> <li>• evaluation?</li> </ul> <p>What principles guide these mechanisms? How are people appointed to mechanisms such as advisory councils?</p>	<p><i>Consider how to accommodate for accessibility including those with a disability, language barriers, financial barriers, unpaid caring responsibilities and limited internet or digital access to support equitable opportunities for people with diverse lived experience.</i></p>
<p><b>Communication</b> How are opportunities communicated to the wider public?</p>	<p><i>Consider the languages, formats and public places used to reach priority populations, as well as digital access and accessibility needs.</i></p>
<p><b>Participation</b> How do these mechanisms support people with lived experience? How are they accessible to people who may face additional barriers to meaningful engagement?</p>	<p><i>Consider inclusive processes such as:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reimbursement and recognition</li> <li>• trauma informed referrals</li> <li>• flexible and remote opportunities as well as in person, at accessible times for constituents.</li> </ul>

<b>Non-government organisations, including advocacy groups</b>	<b>Considerations</b>
<p><b>Mechanisms</b> Who are the spokespeople for your organisation?</p> <p>Do you have clear operational policies and procedures to support clients, former clients or members engage in consultation mechanisms?</p>	<p><i>Consider inclusive processes such as briefings, debriefs and referrals.</i></p>
<p><b>Communication/collaboration</b> How do you communicate about opportunities to participate in consultation mechanisms as representatives of or to inform your organisation's input?</p> <p>How might you strengthen partnerships with relevant organisations?</p>	<p><i>Consider the languages, formats and public places used to reach priority populations, as well as digital access, accessibility needs, and the role of trusted staff and stakeholders in engaging clients, former clients or members.</i></p> <p><i>Consider consumer and lived experience advocacy groups, as well as appropriate services for referrals and support.</i></p>



<p><b>Support</b></p> <p>How do you support community members or other key stakeholders to participate in your advocacy?</p> <p>Do you run or refer to programs for lived and living experience advocates?</p> <p>What training is available? For example, media training, policy and advocacy, campaigning, leadership etc.</p>	<p><i>Consider implications for safety, trauma informed support, reimbursement and recognition.</i></p> <p><i>Consider leadership opportunities to build on and share lived experience advocacy.</i></p>
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<b>Individuals, community members including lived experience advocates</b>	<b>Considerations</b>
<p><b>Mechanisms</b></p> <p>Are you connected with any existing groups that provide advice to governments?</p> <p>Who could you connect with in your local, regional or national community to engage in relevant opportunities?</p>	<p><i>Consider connecting with health peak bodies and joining health movements such as Australian Women's Health Alliance, professional associations or consumer groups.</i></p> <p><i>There are many government mechanisms for individuals and groups. For example, each health profession that is part of the <a href="#">National Registration and Accreditation Scheme</a> is represented by a National Board. Recruitment for board members and panels occur via the <a href="#">Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency</a>.</i></p>
<p><b>Communication/collaboration</b></p> <p>How or where can you find out about different opportunities?</p>	<p><i>Consider local, state/territory or national notices, newsletters, social media, government and members of parliament websites.</i></p>
<p><b>Support/development</b></p> <p>What skills, knowledge or professional/lived/living expertise do you have that can lend itself to civic participation?</p> <p>What skills and knowledge would you like to build on to be able to participate?</p> <p>What could support you to participate and where could you access this support from?</p>	<p><i>For example, policy and advocacy, campaigning, leadership or media training.</i></p> <p><i>Consider in person and online programs and support groups for consumers and people with lived experience, local small grants where available to support studies and broader support.</i></p>



## Additional resources for future learning

### Community engagement

- World Health Organization, [\*Community Engagement: A Health Promotion Guide for Universal Health Coverage in the Hands of the People\*](#), World Health Organization, 2020.

### Lived experience advocacy and consumer and community involvement

- Australian Alcohol & Other Drugs Council, [\*Best Practice Guide for AOD Services in Media Engagement and Lived and Living Experience Storytelling\*](#), Australian Alcohol & Other Drugs Council, nd.
- Women's Health Research, Translation and Impact Network, [\*Consumer and community involvement\*](#), by Women's Health Research, Translation and Impact Network, nd.
- Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, [\*For consumers\*](#), Australian Government, nd.
- Domestic Violence Victoria, [\*The Family Violence Experts by Experience Framework Executive Summary June 2020\*](#), University of Melbourne 2020.
- Institute for Health Transformation, [\*Health Consumers Centre\*](#), Deakin University, nd.
- National Mental Health Commission, [\*Lived Experience Workforce Guidelines\*](#), Australian Government, 2023.
- Guides on remuneration
  - Department of Families Fairness and Housing Victoria, [\*Guidance on Payment, Reimbursement and Recognition\*](#), Victorian Government, nd.
  - Health Consumers Queensland, [\*Paying Consumers\*](#), Health Consumers Queensland, 2024.
  - Department of Health, [\*Tasmanian Health Senate - Remuneration and Reimbursement Guidelines\*](#), Tasmanian Government, 2025.
  - WA Country Health Service, [\*Engaging Consumer and Carer Representatives Policy\*](#), Government of WA, 2024.
  - Health Consumers' Council, [\*Consumer Representative/Consultation Payment Table\*](#), Health Consumers' Council, 2021.
  - NSW Health, [\*Remuneration fact sheet for staff and organisations\*](#), NSW Government, 2023.

### Policy

- Department of Health, [\*National Women's Health Strategy\*](#), Australian Government, 2018.

This resource is from the '[Introduction to Gender-Responsive Health](#)' e-learning course by Australian Women's Health Alliance.

Last updated May 2025.