



Consumer participation and HASS

Organisations funded by the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) to provide services to people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, are required to achieve accreditation against industry standards: the Homelessness Assistance Service Standards (HASS). The HAS Standards are consistent with Victoria's Consumer Charter for community-managed housing and homelessness services, which states that consumers have the right to:

- make choices that will affect their future
- participate in the decision-making process of organisations providing services to them
- make a complaint or appeal a decision they do not agree with and receive an answer that makes sense to them.

Themes

Four main themes relevant to consumer participation run through the HAS Standards:

1. Organisations must provide consumers with opportunities and support to enable them to contribute to organisational decision-making and planning.
2. Organisations must be accessible to a diverse range of consumers – this is as relevant for consumer participation as for service delivery.
3. Organisations must provide consumers with clear, accurate information about services and organisational processes.
4. Organisations must ensure that consumers are actively involved in case planning processes.

Evidence

The HAS Standards require each housing or homelessness organisation to demonstrate how it fulfils these requirements. Relevant evidence supporting accreditation in this area might include (for example):

- A documented organisational consumer participation plan or strategy;
- Templates used for seeking consumer feedback;
- A position description for a consumer representative;
- Reports on feedback gathered through CP processes;
- Implementation of specific initiatives driven by consumer input.

Standards addressing consumer participation

The following table lists sections of the HAS Standards of direct relevance to consumer participation. For more detail, refer to the HAS Standards, available online at: <http://www.housing.vic.gov.au>.

Table 1: HAS Standards addressing consumer participation

Standard 1.1: Rights-based approach

People's rights are all upheld in all aspects of the organisation's work.

Relevant signposts include:

- 1.1.3 People are consistently informed of their rights and responsibilities under the Consumer Charter and the information is presented in an appropriate and accessible way.
- 1.1.4 The organisation has involved consumers in the development of responsibilities and includes consumers in regular reviews.
- 1.1.5 The organisation uses a range of strategies to assist people to exercise their rights.

Standard 1.2: Consumer participation

Consumers contribute to determining the way the organisation provides services.

Standard 1.2 states that organisations should include consumers in the development of consumer participation mechanisms. Relevant signposts include:

- 1.2.1 The organisation's written documents reflect a strong commitment to enabling consumer participation.
- 1.2.2 The organisation regularly seeks ongoing feedback from consumers and consults with them whenever it is considering major changes to service delivery.
- 1.2.3 People are informed about how they can contribute to and participate in the organisation's decision making.
- 1.2.4 The organisation has identified and addressed barriers that may limit consumer participation in the organisation.
- 1.2.5 The organisation supports staff to work effectively with consumers.
- 1.2.6 The organisation monitors the level of consumer participation and evaluates how consumer feedback is used in decision making and planning activities.

Standard 1.3: Complaints and appeals

Complaints and appeals are addressed promptly, respectfully and fairly without compromising services to the person complaining or appealing.

Complaints mechanisms are one avenue for consumers to provide feedback and input to organisations and are therefore an aspect of consumer participation. Complaints and appeals represent an opportunity to improve service delivery and organisational systems.

Table 1: HAS Standards addressing consumer participation - continued

<p>Standard 2.2: Initial assessment Each person approaching the organisation is provided with a timely, quality response in which his or her immediate needs are addressed and an appropriate service is identified.</p>
<p>Provision of accurate, clear information is a basic aspect of consumer participation. This includes information about all services, resources and opportunities that may be available. Relevant signposts include: 2.2.10 The assessment process encourages and supports people to be actively involved in identifying their needs, risk factors and preference for service responses.</p>
<p>Standard 3.1: Providing equitable access to support services People are provided with fair, equitable and transparent access to support.</p>
<p>Accessibility is a key factor for consumer participation in planning and evaluation activities, as well as ability to access services. Relevant signposts include: 3.1.2 The organisation's offices, venues and activities are accessible to its potential and current consumers. 3.1.4 The organisation provides people with clear information about the organisation, the support it offers and any limitations of that support.</p>
<p>Standard 3.2: Engagement, assessment and case planning Each consumer has the opportunity to actively participate in an assessment and planning process that is strengths-based and emphasises long term solutions. Consumers are central to discussions about identifying and meeting their needs.</p>
<p>Assessment and case planning should be driven by the consumer and guided or supported by the case manager. To achieve this, people with high or complex needs may require the support of a friend, family member, advocacy service or carer to assist in advocating on their behalf during the case management process. Relevant signposts include: 3.2.1 The organisation has a documented system for case planning which reflects a commitment to flexible and consumer-centred approaches. 3.2.2 The organisation's documented system for case planning includes ongoing assessment and uses an assessment tool that encourages people to consider their needs within a holistic framework. 3.2.7 Each person is supported to actively participate in the case planning process.</p>

(continued)

<p>Standard 3.3: Responsive support Each person receives appropriate support to achieve the goals of the case plan they have negotiated with the service.</p>
<p>Service provision should place an emphasis on creating a safe environment that enables people to make decisions and take more control over their lives. Relevant signposts include: 3.3.5 The organisation encourages people to drive decision making within their case plan.</p>
<p>Standard 3.4: Exit planning and case closure Each person is supported in developing a plan for exiting the service.</p>
<p>Clear, collaborative planning processes enable people to make informed decisions about their level of engagement with the service and minimise the likelihood of poor or unsustainable outcomes. Relevant signposts include: 3.4.1 The organisation has a documented process for exit planning and case closure that involves the people concerned and is integrated with other case management processes.</p>
<p>Standard 4.1: Supporting parents and accompanying children Parents or carers are assisted in supporting children and young people in their care so that each child's needs are identified and met and their rights are respected.</p>
<p>This standard supports the participation of children and young people in decisions regarding case planning and service delivery. Relevant signposts include: 4.1.6 The organisation supports children to participate in developing their own case planning process in collaboration with their parents. 4.1.10 With the parents' knowledge, the organisation consults children and youth about decisions that will affect them.</p>
<p>Standard 4.4: Providing culturally competent services Each person receives a service that is sensitive to and respectful of their culture and language, including the importance of preserving significant networks and relationships.</p>
<p>Particular attention is required to ensure that consumer participation mechanisms are accessible and appropriate to people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Relevant signposts include: 4.4.1 The organisation's policies and processes reflect a commitment to providing culturally competent services. (This should include encouragement for ethnic or cultural groups to participate in planning and conducting specific events or activities.) 4.4.2 The organisation has clear information about its services available in appropriate community languages or presented in a culturally appropriate way. 4.4.5 Organisations use interpreters as appropriate during each element of case management.</p>