

POSITION STATEMENT

Remuneration and Reimbursement for Consumers

November 2015

Introduction

Health Consumers Alliance of SA (HCA) is the peak body for health consumers and health consumer organisations. HCA defines health consumers as “people who use, or are potential users, of health services including their family and carers”. Since 2002 HCA has supported a network of consumers, carers and experienced advocates, nominees and representatives. This is central to our vision:

‘Consumers at the heart of health care’.

Background

Advocates, nominees and representatives are consumers who are individual members of HCA, or are consumer members of organisations which have HCA membership. These roles provide opportunities for members to utilise their skills, knowledge and passion to provide an effective and legitimate consumer perspective. HCA’s objective is to promote and facilitate the voices of health consumers within decision making.

Consumer-centred care and consumer engagement are supported by the Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights, which acknowledges consumers have the right to have a say and be heard; to be engaged in the decisions about their individual healthcare; and in health policy development and service planning, implementation and evaluation.

HCA Position

HCA recommends that health services and health-related organisations intending to invite consumers to contribute to the planning, management and review of services and programs should offer them a sitting fee for their time. It is also an expectation that the consumers be fully reimbursed for all out-of-pocket expenses associated with their participation. Through our advocacy work HCA has made specific recommendations to SA Health regarding rates of remuneration and reimbursement for health consumers engaging with health services in South Australia. We also support including preparation time as part of the sitting fee as well as adopting the practice of indexing the hourly rate on a yearly basis.

Purpose of the Position

There are three main principles that underpins HCA's position on remuneration:

1. Resources should be made available for consumers to participate in decision-making, so that participation does not impact on the financial resources of consumers and leave them out of pocket. In this context, **re-imburement of expenses** for consumers to be able to attend a meeting is appropriate.
2. Knowledge and contribution of consumer representatives needs to be recognised alongside the other parties involved in health planning and decision making. In this context, **sitting fees** are an appropriate recognition of contribution.
3. Many consumers become involved in health services or health organisations as a way of 'giving back' to those who might have helped them. Others become involved through a sense of community service. Consumers see such involvement as voluntary. HCA recognises that consumers have the right to accept or refuse payment for their contribution and or participation.

HCA supports the participation, attendance and/or contribution of health consumers on a range of local and state committees of Commonwealth, State and Local governments as well as other non-government organisations. In these situations, the participation, attendance and /or contribution of health consumers is above and beyond a general level of consultation and usually involves the consumer bringing a consumer perspective to matters under consideration and the consumer is expected to take part in the decision-making process.

This can include:

- Presenting how consumers may feel and think about certain issues
- Contributing the consumer experience
- Enabling connections to broader consumer and community networks, in order to share current users' experiences, wider than just their own personal experience.

Consumer representatives are members of a group, however titled (eg committee, working group, Board, focus group, chairperson responsibility, etc) and the expectations of how the consumer representative should be involved may vary accordingly. A consumer representative should be an active member of a consumer organisation, and who is endorsed by the CEO/ Board of that organisation and is accountable to that organisation as the consumer representative.

Figure 1 below illustrates the types of role a consumer representative may have:



Figure 1 Source: Cancer Australia (2013). Consumer Involvement Toolkit. Cancer Australia.

Reimbursement / Sitting Fees Recommended Rates

The level of sitting fees/reimbursement can include an hourly rate for sitting and travel time that reflects loss of income and time commitment. Payment can also be made for incurred costs such as travel (including parking, flights and mileage), accommodation, childcare and other caring costs such as respite care (to enable carers to attend meetings) printing and telephone costs.

If it is required that the consumer read a significant amount of documents prior to the meeting, such as sent out in pre-reading format, and where the intention is that the readings will form part of the meeting, then an amount of time for such reading should be agreed upon and this time should form part of the sitting fee for the meeting.

Participating in Consultations

It has also become increasingly common to ask consumers to participate in consultations. HCA recommends that as an acknowledgement of the time and value of their contribution, the organising agency offers all or some of following - re-imburement for travel expenses, light refreshments and a gift voucher.

Good Practice

Payment or re-imbusement arrangements should be in place and explained to the consumer prior to the beginning of their participation. This information needs to include the name and contact details of the staff member allocated to this task.

It may be important for some consumers to receive their re-imbusement for travel expenses prior to attending the meeting or activity. It is best to discuss this with them in advance.

Payment and re-imbusement should be made promptly.

References

Health Consumers Alliance, 2015. Consumer Advocates Nominees and Representatives Position Statement, South Australia

Health Consumers Queensland 2014. Remuneration and Reimbursement of Consumers Position Statement, Queensland

Health Issues Centre, 2015. Paying and Reimbursing Consumers Position Statement, Victoria

Cancer Australia and Cancer Voices Australia, 2011. National Framework for Consumer Involvement in Cancer Control, Cancer Australia, Canberra, ACT.

SA Health, 2013. A Framework for Active Partnership with Consumers and the Community, Government of South Australia.

SA Health, 2013. A Guide for Engaging with Consumers and the Community, Government of South Australia.

SA Health, 2015. Policy Directive: Sitting Fees and Reimbursement for External Individuals Policy Directive, Government of South Australia.