

## Research into the need for an Individual Advocacy Service

### Introduction

Australia, in line with many Western countries, is moving toward a consumer-centred approach to healthcare. A healthcare system that is consumer-centred provides a stronger emphasis on individualised care, multi-disciplinary team management and enhanced consumer health literacy, including improved accessibility to more information for more diverse groups of consumers. Australian healthcare systems are choosing to embrace consumer-centred care, and are bringing community experiences and consumer involvement into decision making on day-to-day practices and longer-term policy development.

Advocacy is a prominent feature of the consumer-centred care model. In 2012, a report was commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, *Advocacy and action in public health: Lessons from Australia, 1901 > 2006*. This report praised the role of advocacy in advancing Australia's public health system. By encouraging consumers, along with their family, carers and the wider community, to engage in advocacy and become more active in their own health, better health outcomes can be achieved (Bauman et al 2003).

### HCA Research Project

In February 2018, Bernadette Barrett joined Health Consumers Alliance of SA (HCA) as a social work placement student, as she has a keen interest in policy and research. During her time with HCA, Bernadette will be conducting research into the need for an individual advocacy service to support health consumers in South Australia. While there are multiple organisations in South Australia that offer advocacy support to individuals and communities, a common theme of these organisations is to provide services for specific communities.

Therefore, a consumer could easily look at these organisations and feel as though they do not belong to any of their targeted communities - for example, if they are not a consumer with an intellectual disability, an aged consumer or a consumer with culturally and linguistically diverse needs. Of the organisations that provide support to the broad community, none include an individual advocacy service for health consumers. Many will help consumers with complaints and grievances, but won't be able to call a health service on a consumer's behalf; help consumers with complicated medical forms; attend appointments as a third-party support; or act in other ways as an advocate for the individual.

This is where the gap in services exists. HCA will be conducting research into an individual advocacy service for the broader health consumer population to access and receive personalised advocacy support. Over the coming months, Bernadette will be reaching out to consumers to gather feedback about establishing an individual advocacy service in South Australia. The information and feedback gathered at this stage will feed into a report. It will be used to provide feedback to policy makers and key funding bodies to consider how an individual advocacy service would support South Australian health consumers. An individual advocacy service was HCA's number one call to action in our 2018 State Election Platform.

**HCA would like to extend an invitation to all our consumer members and non-members to get involved in this project.** The more people we have involved providing feedback, the more comprehensive and in-depth our research will be. We will be running focus groups across the different local health networks (LHNs) and will be available to conduct one-on-one interviews if required. We invite you to contact Bernadette directly to ask for information, or if you would like to be involved in a focus group or interview. You can read the detailed consumer fact sheet with more detailed information about the project [here](#).

We have also created two online surveys, to provide a short overview of your opinion on whether an individual advocacy program would be helpful for South Australian health consumers go [here](#). To provide a more in-depth overview of your opinion on whether an individual advocacy program would be helpful for South Australian health consumers go [here](#). It is open to all consumers and we would greatly appreciate your involvement.

You are welcome to complete the survey and be involved in a focus group or interview if you wish.

By engaging consumers from the start, any individual advocacy service developed from this research will be consumer driven and centred.

**Contact information:**

**Bernadette Barrett**

Social Work Student

Email: [bbarrett@hcasa.asn.au](mailto:bbarrett@hcasa.asn.au)

Phone: (08) 8231 4169

Level 1, 12 Pirie Street, Adelaide SA 5000 | GPO Box 2248, Adelaide SA 5001

T: 0882314169 F: 0884105276 E: [info@hcasa.asn.au](mailto:info@hcasa.asn.au) W: [www.hcasa.asn.au](http://www.hcasa.asn.au)

Facebook: HealthConsumersAllianceSA Twitter: @HealthConsumers ABN: 90 294 720 079