

Fact Sheet: Supporting consumer representatives at events

In order to facilitate consumer participation, it is considered best practice for event organisers to consider the needs of health consumers in all aspects of conference planning to ensure they accommodates health consumers.

Consumer engagement during event organisation

When developing the program for an event, including when choosing a venue, event organisers must consider the needs of consumers attending the event. Consideration of these needs will require the event organisers to:

- schedule sessions to run for no more than 2 hours, and keep them strictly to time
- use microphones when conducting sessions in large rooms, or in rooms with background noise
- cater for special dietary needs, and ensure these are noted when attendees register for the conference
- provide appropriate assistance with transport, e.g. a shuttle bus from the airport to the venue may not be appropriate for some health consumers
- ensure disabled access, including wheelchair access is available to the conference venue, and to all facilities within the conference venue (e.g. to allow access to toilets etc.)
- ensure, if overnight accommodation is required, that health consumers who require disabled access are given a hotel room specially equipped to meet their needs, as well as access to personal care services if these are required.

Opportunities for consumers in break-out sessions

Break-out sessions and concurrent sessions with topics related to the main theme of the event are an excellent opportunity to raise the profile of consumers at the event by:

- having consumers chair the break-out sessions
- ensuring a spread of consumer presenters in these sessions
- ensuring articulate consumers are invited to attend and participate from the audience. This may be less confronting than speaking to the whole conference.

Attendance by consumers

A successful national health event should include a consumer presence.

CHF encourages organisations to demonstrate their commitment to consumer participation by meeting the expenses incurred by consumer representatives attending conferences, workshops, roundtables or other events. This recognises the fact that many others attending will have their travel costs covered and will be paid for their time through their professional bodies or salaried employment. Consumers, however, frequently forego their paid employment in order to prepare for

and attend events. Covering these costs eases the financial burden of those consumer representatives to make alternate arrangements for ongoing commitments such as carer responsibilities. CHF does not put its consumer representatives in positions where they will be financially disadvantaged by their desire to improve health care.

When inviting consumers to participate in an event, it is considered best practice for event organisers to book all travel arrangements for consumers and their carers when necessary.

Conference registrations are often expensive and beyond the means of health consumers and health consumer organisations. Consumer attendance at a conference can be encouraged by the event organisers and other organisations which can assist in overcoming cost issues by:

- allocating a number of fully-funded places to consumers or paying registration costs for consumers
- meeting costs for travel and the incidental expenses of the consumer and their carer.
- arranging accommodation – when required due to meeting times or health state.
- taking into account variations in travel costs to ensure that you do not discriminate against some consumers on the basis of geography, for example reimburse actual costs of travel, rather than allocating a fixed sum.
- ensuring policies relating to paying speaker fees are consistent for both consumers and non-consumers.

Without these subsidies, there is unlikely to be a reasonable consumer presence, and the success of the conference will be diminished.

Appropriate selection of funded consumer participants

Where selection processes are used, we recommend they include the input of a recognised consumer organisation. Consumer representatives should be chosen on the basis of:

- their responses to the selection criteria
- an equitable spread across relevant demographics such as gender, location, illness groups

After the conference

Consumers attending on funded places should also be encouraged to report back to their consumer networks, which will in turn gives the organising body an opportunity to promote itself to a wider audience.

Consumers shaping health