



## **National Mental Health Consumer Organisation: Constitution Consultation**

**May 2014**

Feedback provided on behalf of the Mental Health in Multicultural Australia (MHIMA) Project by:

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### **About the MHIMA Project:**

The MHIMA project is funded by the Australian Government, Department of Health and Ageing to provide a national focus for advice and support to providers and governments on mental health and suicide prevention for people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

[www.mhima.org.au](http://www.mhima.org.au)

### **General feedback:**

We thank you for the opportunity to review the National Mental Health Consumer Organisation Constitution (NMHCO) draft document. Overall, we commend the majority of the content presented, however, we recommend the addition of further information to emphasise the commitment to supporting mental health consumers from diverse backgrounds, including people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, to engage in the NMHCO.

People from diverse backgrounds, including CALD backgrounds, are frequently under-represented in 'mainstream' consumer and carer organisations. This is due to a range of factors, including but not limited to, language barriers, differing explanatory models for mental illness, important differences in how people seek support and act on issues of concern (e.g., due to issues such as individualism vs collectivism), and variability in stigma related to mental illness across communities.

We wish to see issues of diversity emphasised in the Constitution, specifically related to how the NMHCO will reflect and address the needs of mental health consumers from diverse

backgrounds. This is a consideration that relates to a range of issues set out in the Constitution, including but not limited to processes related to membership and the Board of Directors.

We have some suggestions for improvement with respect to this issue, as well as suggestions for improving clarity, which are listed below (see page 2). Please note: due to time constraints, our review of the document was limited to the priority areas listed in the flyer (sections 2, 4 and 8).

***Specific feedback:***

- **Suggestion applies throughout document:** Question whether 'Mental Health Consumer' needs to be capitalised, i.e., 'mental health consumer' seems to be the phrase used in everyday language.
- **Section 2.1, b) and c):** The second half of both points, i.e., b) '...through education, learning...', and c) '...by promoting partnerships and service coordination...', seem to relate better to section 2.2 (how the primary objects may be achieved).
- **Section 2.1, c):** Remove 'and' after 'provide national leadership to...'; AND, 'add 'and' between 'management' and 'treatment' on the second to last line.
- **Section 2.2, a):** Recovery is mentioned here, however it does not seem to be included in the glossary or defined anywhere. As recovery has multiple potential meanings, we recommend the intended meaning is included at some point (e.g., glossary).
- **Section 2.2, b):** We believe it is important to bring attention to issues of diversity at this point, to ensure people from diverse backgrounds (broadly defined) are included in a meaningful way in the NMHCO. Below is a suggested modified version of the existing content, in which point (ii) has been separated into two key issues:
  - b) providing:
    - i): (remains the same as shown in document)
    - ii): Attention or focus towards all persons at risk of experiencing a mental illness;
    - iii): Mechanisms and strategies to raise awareness and respond to the challenges and needs of mental health consumers or parts of the community identified as not receiving equitable access to mental health services and support, including but not limited to people from immigrant and refugee backgrounds, people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and LGBTI persons.
- **Section 2.2, d):** Addition of 'to' in between 'the mental health sector' and 'achieve better' (second line)
- **Section 4.2, c), ii):** Addition of 'which' before 'is signed by the applicant' (this suggestion applies to the relevant points under other sections of section 4).

- **Section 8.4 & 8.5:** It is useful to see that ‘The Director Eligibility and Board Composition Policy will promote Director diversity ...’ However, we recommend that this issue is also reflected in section 8.5. We have included potential wording below:
  - **8.5., c) (create new section):** the Directors, as a collective, should represent the diversity of mental health consumers in Australia, including cultural and linguistic diversity and gender diversity.

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