

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION AND PARTICIPATION RESOURCE KIT

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The *Community Consultation and Participation Resource Kit for Area Health Service Managers and Project Leaders* has been produced by the Health Improvement Branch, in collaboration with the Health Public Affairs Branch. The resource kit is a compilation of publications describing community consultation and participation written by other state government organisations, including the area health services, and the former Social Policy Directorate of the NSW Health Department (see example Table 1).

A draft of the resource kit was evaluated favourably by 80 staff from metropolitan area health services, four months after a workshop held in December 1998. The contents:

- provide principles to guide the consultation process and the identification of potential and barriers;
- describe a variety of available consultation methodologies—including focus groups and workshops, public meetings and forums, polling and surveys—and how the methodology chosen should reflect the objective of the consultation;
- suggest communication strategies (for example, consensus decision-making) depending on the purpose of the consultation (that is, information giving, information seeking, information sharing, and/or participatory decision-making);
- provide a checklist to guide the consultation process that includes identifying the issues or problems, clarifying the objectives of consultation and identifying the consultation participants;
- discuss ways of addressing the needs of key stakeholders, particularly people with disabilities, non-English-speaking communities and Aboriginal people;

- list ways of evaluating a consultation to assess whether objectives were achieved and appropriate methodologies were used.

Case studies of consultations by two NSW government agencies—the Home Care Service of NSW and the Office of Youth Affairs—are used to illustrate strategies and methodologies, and to examine the lessons that emerged from each of the consultations.

The kit has been published in a ring binder to allow users to add or remove material easily, and has been produced using original publications that can be used as masters for photocopying. It provides an extensive reference list of published resources, as well as useful contact information for area health services and colleagues with experience and expertise in the process of consultation and participation.

A collection of materials on consultation and participation has been established in the Department of Health Library, including this resource kit and a useful training video from South Australia. The library is on the fourth floor of 173 Miller Street, North Sydney, and the librarian can be contacted by phone on (02) 9319 9078, or by email at gwood@doh.health.nsw.gov.au.

To obtain copies of the *Community Consultation and Participation Resource Kit for Area Health Services Managers and Project Leaders*, please contact Meryl Edwards, Manager Health Improvement Strategy, by telephone on (02) 9391 9319, or by email at medwa@doh.health.nsw.gov.au.

TABLE 1

CONSULTATION BRINGS SOME WIDELY RECOGNISED BENEFITS TO POLICY-MAKING

Identifies stakeholders	A consultation process draws out those with an interest in a policy area and helps define their expectations.
Defines the agenda	A consultation process sets boundaries for a policy question by encouraging debate around a structured set of opinions.
Improves information	An exchange of views among interested parties through consultation ensures that a wide range of information is included in policy discussions.
Exchange of views	Because much consultation involves a two-way exchange, it makes participants aware of the views of others. Dialogue assists in reaching choices that are acceptable to a wide range of interests.
Quality of decision	Because consultation brings a diverse range of views into the policy process, decision-makers are more likely to understand the consequences of their choice and to avoid mistakes that are based on ignorance.
Improves legitimacy	People are more inclined to accept a decision made with consultation than one imposed without discussion.
Compliance through ownership	People prefer to implement a policy they helped to frame.
Avoids challenges	By ensuring a transparent process with appropriate opportunities for public input, policy-makers avoid later political or administrative law challenges. A decision reached through a robust consultative process is more difficult to overturn.

Source: Byrne J, Davis G. Participation and the NSW policy process: A discussion paper for The Cabinet Office NSW. Sydney: NSW Parliament, 1998, p.41.