SUMMARY DOCUMENT: National Mental Health Consumer Organisation Project (2012-2015)

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of an historical piece of work Mental Health Australia (then Mental Health Council of Australia) undertook alongside an expert group of mental health consumer representatives between the years 2012 and 2015, to establish a National Mental Health Consumer Organisation (NMHCO). This project description does not reflect Mental Health Australia's current position on the new lived experience peaks.

Overview

In June 2012, Mental Health Australia was contracted by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing to conduct the National Mental Health Consumer Organisation (NMHCO) Establishment Project. The aim of the project was to establish and auspice a new national mental health consumer organisation that would be consumer-owned and driven, independent, sustainable and built on good governance. It was envisaged that after a brief period of being auspiced, the new organisation would transition to full independence in its third year. A Consumer Reference Group (CRG) was established to provide advice to Mental Health Australia in its implementation of the project, and the eleven CRG members were appointed by the Minister of the time.

Proposed auspicing arrangement, structure and activities

The project proposed that the new organisation would seek to be registered as a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee and have its own governance structure.

It was anticipated that the new organisation would commence operations with a small permanent staffing contingent (4 FTE). It was proposed that the staffing composition could include a CEO, an Admin Officer/PA, a Project/Policy Officer, a Finance/HR Officer and a Membership Officer.

The project proposed that the Consumer Organisation would have a Board of nine directors, selected through a national nomination process. Board and CEO recruitment activities would be undertaken through the establishment of the organisation. It was noted that during the start-up phase, the organisation may benefit from receiving a range of supports from a larger entity, through an auspicing and/or service level agreement, including:

- Finance
- Human resources
- Governance (Company Secretary)
- Communications and stakeholder engagement
- Skills transfer

Through this type of arrangement, the new organisation would take advantage of another entity's existing infrastructure, policies and processes; reducing its initial financial outlay; and allowing it to focus on mission driven outcomes.

It was also recommended that a coordinator from the auspicing body could fulfil a liaison, mentoring and networking role. They would ensure that services are managed and provided to the new organisation in a coordinated way and facilitate access to mental health networks and other experts. The coordinator would work closely with the CEO and staff of the new organisation to ensure that the NMHCO can benefit from the auspicing body's prominence, experience and knowledge of the sector and government processes, vast networks, and established governance procedures.

It was anticipated that the level of auspice support and involvement would reduce over time in support of the organisation becoming fully independent once it demonstrated readiness and suitability to do so. As such, the auspicing agreement would be time limited and contain exit points agreed by both the new organisation's Board and the auspicing body's Board.

It was identified that sufficient seed funding, a strong governance framework and early wins would go a long way to secure the longer-term viability and sustainability of the new organisation.

It was recommended that in the first twelve months the Board and staff of the new organisation focus on:

- governance and sustainability
- membership and stakeholder engagement
- strategic planning.

Resources

You can find additional resources developed throughout the project here:
https://mhaustralia.org/national-mental-health-consumer-organisation-nmhco-establishment-project-completed-may-2015/project-resources