

FINAL CEO Blog for 1 March

Engaging our consumer and carers as experts in mental health reform is a key necessity and challenge for all governments, and the mental health sector more broadly. The announcement of the four Commissioners to undertake the Victorian Royal Commission into Mental Health is just another example of a potential lost opportunity.

To highlight the need, and a possible solution to this challenge, I've asked Lorraine Powell (Consumer Co-Chair) and Emma Donaldson (Carer Co-Chair) of the National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum to write this week's blog.

In addition to this terrific piece by Lorraine and Emma, I'd also encourage you to read another blog in a similar vein, penned so eloquently by my friend [Maria Katsonis](#).

Warm regards,



Frank Quinlan

Chief Executive Officer



**National Mental Health
Consumer & Carer Forum**

Soar beyond the rhetorical:

Nothing About Us, Without Us, is For US

How do we identify and define the positions and people who need to be the ones to make recommendations on fixing a mental health system and support structure that is broken?

The Victorian Royal Commission into Mental Health appointed four experts as Commissioners this week, none of whom identify as a direct consumer of mental health services. These Commissioners will have the authority and power to decide the final recommendations after hearing from witnesses - the people impacted by their experiences of the current mental health system – consumers and carers.

Those people will share their story in the process of consultation. They will openly and bravely tell of trauma, tragedy, heartbreak, restrictive practices, custodial type care, and inequity. They will explain their pain emotionally, socially and financially of access issues, human rights violations, being over-medicated, abuse, and poor communication. Consumers will express the lack of recovery-oriented practice, and pointedly a lack of respect for their intelligence, capabilities and expertise in their own lives.

Participation in this process is paramount, but it is not enough. Consumers and carers are not 'merely repositories of need or recipients of services, but are the very resource that can turn public services around'. It is only then that we will achieve a truly transformative approach to reform.

"The engagement and participation of people with lived experience in mental health and suicide prevention has achieved much over the years and continues to bring about positive change".

Consumers and carers are recognised and respected as being leaders and experts in their own right. We can, and do, provide long-term cost savings, greater outcomes for consumers and carers, and real solutions. But, we can only do so when we have equal weighting and authority as the other professionals.

People living with or through recovery from mental health issues bring with them a breadth and depth of life, educational, professional and personal experiences. Skills as emerging and current leaders, and experts in mental health from a contemporary, lived experience perspective.

The NMHCCF Co-Chairs have just been appointed as members of the Mental Health Principal Committee. This sends a strong statement of intent and belief that consumers and carers can take a leadership role in contributing at a decision-making level in mental health reforms.

By appointing lived experience commissioners and co-chairs on expert advisory panels, we will soar beyond the words in statements and various government reports, frameworks and mental health plans.

Nothing about us, without us, is for us. The chair of the Victorian Royal Commission's Expert Advisory Panel has been announced as a psychiatrist and we support VMIAC's call that there be a consumer co-chair on the Expert Advisory Group, and that consideration is given to appointing a fifth expert Commissioner, a consumer, because then the rhetoric will translate to practice.

Written by Lorraine Powell (Consumer Co-Chair) and Emma Donaldson (Carer Co-Chair) National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum (NMHCCF). The NMHCCF is a combined national voice for mental health consumers and carers. We listen, learn, influence and advocate in matters of mental health reform.