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## Purpose of this Document

This document presents the three-year strategic plan for the Victorian Mental Health Carers Network (VMHCN) from 2013-2016.

The plan is the outcome of a strategic review conducted by Nous, involving stakeholder consultation, an assessment of the organisation's current environment and capabilities and two strategic planning workshops with the VMHCN Board.

This document is presented for the consideration of the Board and is to be shared at its discretion.

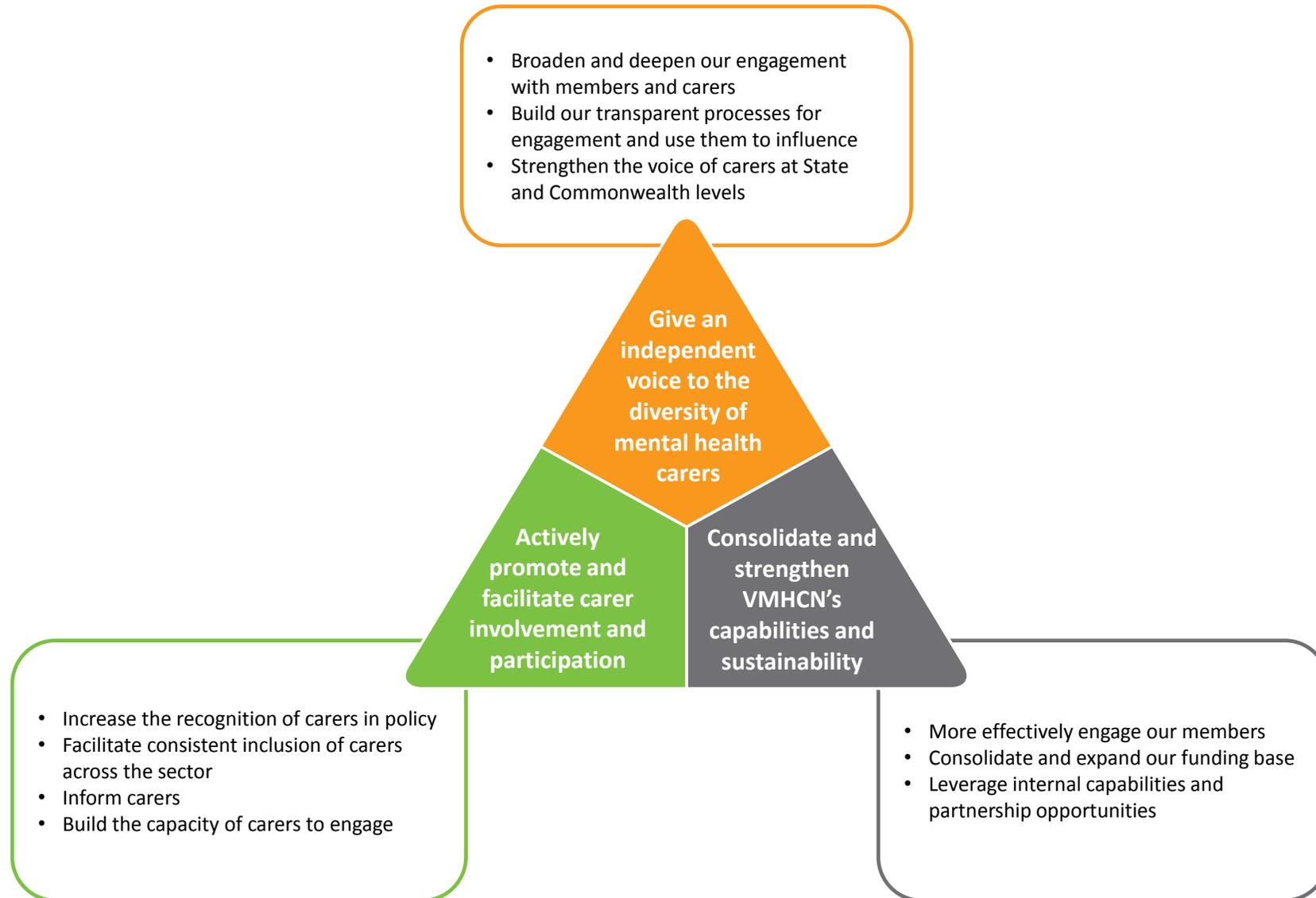
## Our Strategic Plan 2013-2016

VMHCN's Strategic Plan 2013-16 focuses on three strategic objectives to:

1. Give an independent voice to the diversity of mental health carers,
2. Actively promote and facilitate carer involvement and participation, and
3. Consolidate and strengthen VMHCN's capabilities and sustainability.

Each strategic objective cascades into a list of priority actions which are outlined in Figure 1 below. The rest of the Strategic Plan then outlines a number of key activities under each priority action. This framework was developed across two workshops with the Board and seeks to outline the organisation's strategic intent, as well as the activities that will need to be undertaken over the next three years to deliver on this plan.

Figure 1: Strategic Plan 2013-16



# 1 Give an independent voice to the diversity of mental health carers

Strategic objective 1: Give an independent voice to the diversity of mental health carers	
Priority actions	Key activities
1.1 Broaden and deepen our engagement with carers	<p>1.1.1 Review our approach to carer engagement to achieve our strategic objectives.</p> <p>1.1.2 Develop 'public forum' events for carers that aim to facilitate discussion and gather the diversity of views. Conduct at least three per year on an identified issue within the sector e.g. implications of the new mental health act.</p>
1.2 Build our transparent processes for engagement and use them to influence	<p>1.2.1 Create the framework for engagement based on the public participation spectrum</p> <p>1.2.2 Develop position papers from discussions at public forums and circulate these with members to test the issues captured.</p> <p>1.2.3 Tie systemic advocacy (e.g. responses to policy forums) to consultation processes and structure each to support the other.</p> <p>1.2.4 Engage with the Department of Health to identify issues where it is felt the carer perspective is not strongly understood and outline ways to give a greater voice.</p>
1.3 Strengthen the voice of carers at State and Commonwealth levels	<p>1.3.1 Identify and engage partner organisations that will best be able to leverage the carers' voice in State and Commonwealth forums.</p> <p>1.3.2 Maximise VMHCN's presence at key sector meetings and prioritise those that will achieve the greatest impact for carer representation e.g. priority to those attended by key decision makers.</p>

## 2 Actively promote and facilitate carer involvement and participation

Strategic objective 2: Actively promote and facilitate carer involvement and participation	
Priority actions	Key activities
2.1 Increase the recognition of carers in policy	<p>2.1.1 Strengthen input into policy making forums within the sector to improve the mental health service system.</p> <p>2.1.2 Review and strengthen mechanisms for contributing to the policy agenda at the State and Commonwealth level.</p>
2.2 Facilitate consistent inclusion of carers across the sector	<p>2.2.1 Develop a framework for assessing the extent to which the carer's voice is acted on in service delivery and the implementation of policy (e.g. concept of 'carer key performance indicators').</p> <p>2.2.2 Continue to support the development of skills within the mental health workforce to achieve optimal involvement and support of carers.</p>
2.3 Inform carers	<p>2.3.1 Inform carers about their rights.</p> <p>2.3.2 Provide information on contemporary issues.</p> <p>2.3.3 Provide information that will support carers in their caring role.</p>
2.4 Build the capacity of carers to engage	<p>2.4.1 Continue to support the development of systemic advocacy and participation skills amongst carers.</p> <p>2.4.2 Establish a process to identify areas where carers would like more information and/or support.</p> <p>2.4.3 Continue to administer the Carer's Support Fund as efficiently as possible in the interest of carers.</p>

### 3 Consolidate and strengthen VMHCN’s capabilities and sustainability

Strategic objective 3: Consolidate and strengthen VMHCN’s capabilities and sustainability	
Priority actions	Key activities
3.1 More effectively engage our members	3.1.1 Increase the membership base of the Network. 3.1.2 Better engage the executive level of member organisations. 3.1.3 Explore how we best engage organisation members more broadly. 3.1.4 Consider opportunities for collaboration with members as a way of fulfilling both key actions for VMHCN, and assisting members in activities that are aligned with the Network’s objectives.
3.2 Consolidate and expand the funding base	3.2.1 In the short term, review use of current resources and decide how these should reflect strategic priorities and be used to greatest effect. 3.2.2 Over the three year period, use increased profile (from wider consultation and expanded membership base) to expand the organisation’s funding base.
3.3 Leverage internal capabilities and partnership opportunities	3.3.1 Review and enhance systems and processes. 3.3.2 Provide clear guidance for staff of priorities in their work. 3.3.3 Review current activities performed by VMHCN and identify opportunities for these to be completed in partnerships with others (e.g. research) 3.3.4 Seek opportunities to advance VMHCN’s vision through the work of other organisations.

## Our identity

As part of the strategic planning workshop the Board took time to review VMHCN's vision and mission. It was decided that these statements should be updated; the new versions are provided below.

### **Our vision**

Mental health carers are respected and involved, their participation is valued, and they are supported in their role as carers and to improve their well-being.

### **Our mission**

As the peak body in Victoria representing carers of people of mental ill health, we promote, advocate and drive change to achieve:

- Optimal involvement of carers in the treatment and recovery of individual consumers,
- Effective participation of carers in planning, delivery and evaluation of mental health services,
- Respectful services and systems that support better mental health outcomes,
- Better support for carers, through partnerships, to increase their capabilities and well-being.

## Our environment

VMHCN's capabilities and operating environment have been analysed separately as part of this project, covered in the Current State Assessment document provided by Nous. The Board also explored the Network's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats during the strategic planning workshop. A useful strategic plan will clearly address the challenges and opportunities within the Network's environment. VMHCN's three-year Strategic Plan does this in the following ways.

### **Our strategy builds on VMHCN's unique capabilities and position in the sector**

Recognising that funding will continue to be constrained, the Strategic Plan seeks to maximise what the organisation can do for mental carers with current resources. For example, the Network is known for consistently working hard, taking advantage of opportunities with energy and getting a lot done. Appreciating this strength, the Strategic Plan will provide clearer guidance to staff in where to focus their efforts, increasing the impact of their work while avoiding the risk of staff burning out.

VMHCN is also well placed in the sector, with unique connections and in-depth knowledge of the mental health area. Through the Strategic Plan, this strength will be leveraged by emphasising partnerships and increased collaboration with members as a means of advancing the carers' voice. Achieving outcomes in partnership with others allows VMHCN to have the broad influence it seeks, while acknowledging that that it simply cannot be everywhere, all the time.

### **It recognises that a peak body's value comes from speaking with authority on behalf of constituents**

As a peak body, the ability of VMHCN to influence comes from its capacity to facilitate far reaching discussion and capture a diversity of carer views. In our consultations, the Department of Health

emphasised a firm commitment in government for hearing this strong voice of mental health carers. Members are also seeking a greater profile and wider engagement with carers.

Understanding these expectations of stakeholders, the Strategic Plan focuses on VMHCN's unique position to mobilise carer views. It seeks to maximise this role through broader and deeper engagement with members and carers, and by grounding the Network's systemic advocacy in transparent consultative processes. By strengthening the way in which VMHCN acts as a voice for the diversity of carers, the profile and influence of the Network will grow.

## It also aligns with emerging trends in the sector and considers the future environment for carers

The mental health sector has received increasing policy attention in recent years and is currently undergoing a period of significant reform. VMHCN's policy work to date has achieved real progress for carers, demonstrated in the new Victorian Mental Health Act and its acknowledgement of the role of families and carers.

As the sector evolves, a continued emphasis on policy advocacy at the State government level will not always be the most effective way to achieve change on behalf of carers. Recognising this, the Strategic Plan will continue VMHCN's strong work in policy while also considering what will be the most pressing carer concerns in the new policy context. New objectives will increase the focus on how policy is applied in practice, and ensure carers have the capabilities and knowledge to fully exercise their unprecedented rights. The increasing involvement of the Commonwealth government in the mental health area has also been acknowledged. The Network will now seek to work in collaboration with others to ensure carers have a strong voice at this federal level as well as in Victoria.

## Next Steps

Further work will be needed to apply VMHCN's three-year strategic plan. As part of discussions with the Board, the following were highlighted as important next steps:

- The Executive Director, with assistance from Board members, will provide an outline of work currently completed by the organisation that is not clearly mandated for in the strategic plan. Of these activities the Board will determine whether they should continue or stop, and for the latter group consider an appropriate exit strategy to cease the work.
- The Board will review the priority of key activities and the timeline for their completion, in particular choosing those to be completed in the next 12 months.
- The Executive Director and the Board will review the capacity of the organisation to deliver the strategic plan, considering current human resource capacity, organisation structure and processes. The Board is to provide further guidance on how the strategic plan will be implemented if any significant capability gaps or resource constraints are identified.
- Upon completion of the con-current Branding project, the Board will review the organisation's media profile strategy and outline any subsequent initiatives to be completed.

### Implementation supported by business cases

Developing a series of business cases to achieve each strategic objective will also be an important next step. As part of this process Board members will be allocated a different priority action to 'champion' and assist in the development of a business case for the associated activities. These business cases will

only need to be concise documents – a ‘plan on a page’ template has been suggested – but should clearly outline the intent and parameters for each key activity.

In undertaking this exercise, for each key activity VMHCN should aim to:

1. Provide a clear statement of the objective and scope of the proposed activity and its connection to VMHCN Strategic Plan.
2. Analyse the costs and benefits of the activity – considering both quantitative and qualitative measures.
3. Identify the risks associated with the activity and provide an indication as to who is positioned to bear those risks, and a proposed means to manage risk.
4. Consider all realistic options for completing the activity.
  - a. Identify the operating budget (revenue and expenses) over the activity’s lifecycle and the capital cost impacts over its life (initial costs and any known renewals requirements)
  - b. Establish whether the activity could be achieved under the organisation’s current distribution of resources. If no, identify what changes would need to be made.
  - c. Consider how collaboration with members and/or partner organisations could help to complete this key activity.
5. Detail a measurable outcome for the activity.
  - a. Identify overall performance targets across the three years.
  - b. Detail milestones and key deliverables to structure staff work loads.
6. Specify the management and governance structure for delivering the activity.
  - a. Clarify who will be responsible for completing the key activity.
  - b. Established what periodic monitoring or reporting procedures will apply.