

VICTORIAN MENTAL HEALTH  
CARERS NETWORK INC.

STRATEGIC PLAN

2010 – 2013

Adopted by the Board of the VMHCN Inc. on 11<sup>th</sup> August, 2010

## **INTRODUCTION**

At the outset of the planning process, a number of important observations were made by John McGrath, patron of the VMHCN and representatives of the Department of Health. These observations were maintained in the forefront of thinking throughout the planning process. These strategic considerations included:

- Recognition that mental health reforms are entering a new phase at the Federal and State level, with strategies and implementation plans being developed that will change how services are delivered, and how consumers and carers will be treated. In Victoria, the Mental Health Reform Strategy and the impending redrafting of the Mental Health Act make this a crucial time for all involved.
- The Carers Network has an important role to play as a peak advocacy body that can partner with the State to work towards continued improvement for consumers and their carers.
- As a Victorian-based organisation, Victorian Mental Health Carers Network needs to consider how to evolve and contribute in a Federal context, if the reform agendas result in a stronger role and function of the federal authorities.
- In shaping its future, Victorian Mental Health Carers Network can learn from other successful organisations that strongly commit to their core functions, and project a strong and consistent image and message.

## **IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS**

The use of some terminology throughout the strategic plan requires precise definition.

- “Carers” includes family members, relatives or friends of people with a mental illness.
- “Carer involvement” refers to carers being involved in individual care planning and decision making.
- “Carer participation” refers to carers participating in systemic change within the mental health system.
- “Carer support” refers to all types of support needed by carers to enable them to function effectively as carers and to maintain their personal well-being.

## **VISION**

*Carers are respected and involved, their participation is valued, and they are supported in their role as carers.*

## **MISSION**

*As the peak body in Victoria representing carers of people with a mental illness, we promote and advocate for:*

- *Involvement of carers in the treatment and recovery of individual consumers,*
- *Participation of carers in planning, delivery and evaluation of mental health services,*
- *Comprehensive support for carers, including information, education and training, respite, financial support, peer support,*
- *Improvement in mental health services.*

## **VALUES**

- *Respect*
- *Empowerment*
- *Diversity*
- *Equity*
- *Partnership*
- *Excellence*
- *Innovation*
- *Inclusion*

## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

These strategic objectives have been developed to strengthen the capacity of the VMHCN so that it can effectively impact and influence policy development at a state and federal level; ensuring that carers involvement, participation and need for support are actively incorporated in all areas.

### **1. Deliver meaningful contributions that will significantly advance the involvement, participation and support of carers**

#### **Strategies:**

- Continue to promote the roles of carers described in the Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy and ensure that consumers and carers are involved in all aspects of reform implementation.
- Set up a working group to develop by October 2010 a preliminary plan for advising carers of changes in the Mental Health Act and assisting them in dealing with these changes; secure funding for state-wide promotional and training activities; review the new Act and refine the plan accordingly; take a lead role in supporting carers in this area.
- Develop a framework in collaboration with the Victorian Department of Health Quality Team for use in their site visits to Area Mental Health Services (AMHSs) for assessing the adequacy and implementation of carer participation plans, and secure its acceptance and adoption.
- Successfully advocate for annual budgets for carer participation in mental health services and for annual reporting to the Department of Health on the outcomes of the participation plans.
- Promote the Mental Health Experience-based Co-design (MH ECO) methodology (incorporating the former Consumer & Carer Experience Initiative) as an appropriate, evidence-based quality improvement process, aiming to establish a timetable for roll-out of the methodology as a routine in all Victorian mental health services.
- Develop training modules, in partnership with member organizations, to provide practical guidance to potential (undergraduate) and current mental health

professionals in engaging and working with families; promote carer participation in the delivery of this training and initiate action aimed at making this training accredited and mandatory.

- Identify, train and support carers to be appointed on Regional Boards and policy working groups
- Promote assessment of carer support needs and the development of carer support plans within mental health services.
- Conduct a research project to identify the most effective models for meeting carers' needs, covering all parts of the diverse carer community and all stages of carers' life experience.
- Document the current range of carer support services available specifically for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) communities, promote this information via VMHCN and partner websites, identify service gaps and advise state and national governments accordingly
- Continue to administer the Carer Support fund efficiently, equitably and transparently, maintaining our high level of customer satisfaction; conduct an external review before the end of 2010.

## **2. Refine and expand key strategic relationships so as to raise the profile, recognition, and value of the Network.**

### **Strategies:**

- Provide administrative support to the Carer Consultants Network of Victoria (CCNV) as its auspicing body, and facilitate the contribution of carer consultants to policy development and systems change.
- Promote appropriate training and industrial conditions to strengthen the carer consultant workforce.
- Develop a strong partnership with the proposed Workforce Development Institute and establish the Carer/Consumer Research and Evaluation Units (CREUs) of

VMHCN and Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council (VMIAC) as part of the Centre of Excellence.

- Draft a relationship strategy for working collaboratively with the Victorian Department of Health, the Minister for Mental Health and other key organisations, including those with which a stronger relationship is proposed; develop a plan of action and review progress every three months.
- Identify and establish relationships with like organisations in other states with whom to partner in communications at the national level.

**3. Establish a consistent and readily recognisable image of the Network that reinforces its identity as the peak advocacy body for carers, and will be reflected in all communications, promotions and marketing.**

**Strategies:**

- Assess and evaluate the Network's name, image and identity and develop a plan for preparing a clearer and recognised "brand" for the Network, presenting this proposal to Network members by November 2010.
- Redevelop and enhance the website by the end of 2010.
- Construct a Communications Strategy during early 2011, which identifies ways in which the profile of the Network can be elevated within the mental health system and communication can be improved, exploring media such as newsletters, promotional events, partnerships, sponsorships and website.
- Develop a proposal by May 2011 for hosting a state-wide Carers Conference in late 2012 or early 2013, which will raise the profile of the Network and attract a wide range of participants with whom strategic alliances can be formed to advance mutual objectives.

**4. Strengthen and expand the membership base of the Network so as to include specific target groups, provide greater connection with grassroots carers and regional networks, and provide a solid base for Board succession planning.**

**Strategies:**

- Establish a short term sub-committee to identify the profile of an optimum membership base, considering the need to include all parts of the diverse carer community, and propose strategies for launching a membership drive in 2011.
- Establish a working party to consider the demography of the current Board; develop a proposal for a succession plan and report back by November 2010.
- Strengthen the relationship with regional carer networks by inviting representatives to Network meetings and increasing visits to their groups, and augment these meetings and visits with electronic communication.
- Strengthen relationships with aboriginal and CaLD communities by supporting regional carer networks, carer consultants and local CaLD communities.

**5. Extend the capabilities of the Network by maximising the use of innovative evidence-based initiatives.**

**Strategies:**

- Promote VMHCN's and VMIAC's experience-based research capability and bring in at least one significant research project each year.
- Extend the use of pro bono services, student placements, mentoring relationships and learning organisation models to bring new experience and contributions to the Network.

- Develop the Network's capacity by recruiting and training 20 carers, with a diversity of backgrounds and experiences, in a Skills Bank by December 2011 to represent the Network in relevant forums and regional boards.
- Seek additional resources to develop the capacity of CREU to identify and include the participation of carers with diverse backgrounds and experiences in its research activities.

**6. Ensure the financial sustainability of the Network by successfully diversifying and expanding its funding base.**

**Strategies:**

- Build the Network's relationship with current funding bodies and over the next two years secure recurrent funding to sustain a team of 8 EFT staff.
- Secure other sources of funding (federal government, philanthropic, consultancy, research grants, training etc) to support an additional 4 EFT positions through a sustained effort, with specific projects in mind, over the next three years.

# **Attachment 1**

## **The Planning Process**

In preparing this strategic plan, Board members and staff:

- Identified the stakeholders whose policies and interests needed to be taken into account,
- Considered the changes that have occurred since the preparation of the last strategic plan, and
- Reviewed and analysed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of the Network, its stakeholders, and the external environment that needed to be taken into account in forging the direction for the coming years.

The strategic planning process highlighted many opportunities and issues that will influence the direction and priorities of the Network over the next years, and some are documented below to demonstrate the thoroughness of the process, and to ensure they can be revisited and reassessed.

## **Opportunities and Issues**

The most significant current influences are the Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy and the review of the Mental Health Act. The strategic plan attempts to capture the critical implications of these initiatives. However, the Commonwealth's aspirations for national uniformity may not be consistent with Victoria's position, and the final outcomes of negotiations may have some negative effects on services and support groups which will need to be countered and overcome.

The forthcoming State and Federal elections may defer the reform agendas, leaving a climate of uncertainty for some time. However these elections present an opportunity to identify and cultivate existing and aspiring members of parliament who have an interest in advancing mental health reforms.

The strategic plan has placed emphasis on the development and maintenance of significant strategic relationships, and the Network acknowledges that there are some gaps, including aged and indigenous mental health organisations, to be addressed. The

outcome of the reform initiatives may also require effort to establish new previously unchartered partnerships, particularly at a national level.

The Network has assessed its internal capacity to function successfully as the peak advocacy body for carers, and initiated some forthcoming strategies to heighten its performance, particularly in relation to funding, membership and skills development. The passion, commitment, integrity and proven experience of its members and staff provide a powerful platform on which to base future growth. Coupled with this, the Network has elected to address some significant challenges associated with its image and identity, and recognises that courage and perseverance will be necessary to successfully address and negotiate identity, marketing and communication issues.

The Network has a strong historical perspective of the needs of carers which underpins a valuable and robust data base of carers' issues, needs and requirements. The research and training programs of the Network are to be priority functions which should partner effectively with the proposed Workforce Development Institute.

This review of the strategic plan highlighted the need for ongoing systemic planning and review, and the intent is that when adopted, the plan will be dispersed into the annual Business Plans, Budgets and Action Plans of the Network, whilst simultaneously embracing the need to be able to respond and change direction when required.