



Evaluation of consumer involvement



Has consumer involvement improved the quality and safety of our health organisation or service? Has it had a positive impact upon the design of research agendas and priorities? Has it led to more consumer-focused policy?

Most organisations would like to know the answers to these questions...but to get these answers you will need to evaluate! In fact, you will hopefully evaluate each different consumer involvement activity.

Some general information about evaluation

Evaluation is a dynamic process involving many stages of reflecting and planning, gathering information, analysing and interpreting, making judgments, reading conclusions, and modifying or improving a program.

An evaluation cycle (as shown in the following diagram) includes the development and planning of an activity, the implementing of the activity, evaluating and monitoring the activity, documenting and disseminating the results of the activity, learning from evidence, and modifying the initial planning, which in turns allows for the formulation of a new activity.



Diagram adapted from: Department of Human Services, 2006: *Doing it with us not for us*. Melbourne, Victoria. p. 47



Types of evaluation

Three basic types of evaluation can be used for consumer participation strategies or activities. They can be used sequentially, as they usually build on the former.

Evaluation of the process: emphasis is on looking at all the processes involved in the activity as well as the immediate effects.

- How was the experience for consumers and what were the immediate effects for them?
- Who were the consumers and how well did they represent the target group?
- What was the consumers' level of satisfaction with the project?
- What additional activities were undertaken in response to the needs of consumers?

Evaluation of the impact: focuses on the short-term impact of the activity and is usually related to the objectives of the activity; normally includes unanticipated effects.

- Were the purpose, aims and objectives achieved?
- Were the consumer participation strategies or activities effective to gather the required information?
- Was the implementation of the activity achieved within the budget and timelines and were the skills sufficient to implement the project adequately?
- Were there any unintended effects of the activity?
- Were the results disseminated as planned?

Evaluation of outcomes: identifies the long-term outcomes of an activity that are frequently related to the purpose and aims of a broader goal (e.g. consumer participation policy).

The long-term effects of a program are usually the end-points of an integrated approach to an issue. Thus, outcome evaluation would assess whether a program has achieved its main aim, the conditions required to implement this aim successfully in the future, and whether the conditions to successfully achieve an aim can be reproduced in the future.

Evaluation tools

A variety of tools can be used for evaluation. The selection of tools is dependent upon the aims of the evaluation, timeframe, resources and skills of staff.

Tools that can be used for evaluation may include:

- Documents – minutes, reports, newsletters
- Story-telling
- Focus group interviews and discussions
- Informal feedback
- 'Exit' interviews
- Observation
- Face-to-face or telephone interviews
- Self-completed questionnaires
- Photos
- Statistics
- Feedback

The information provided above is adapted from: South Australian Community Health Research Unit, Department of Health, Flinders University. 2000. *Improving health services through consumer participation*, Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, Canberra.