

[insert organisation name/logo]

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## Communications Policy

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**Document Status:** Draft or Final

**Date Issued:** [date]

**Lead Author:** [name and position]

**Approved by:** [insert organisation name] Board of Directors on [date]

**Scheduled Review Date:** [date]

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### Record of Policy Review

Review Date	Person Initiating/Leading Review	Other People Consulted

### Triggers for Policy Review (tick all that apply)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Standard review is timetabled.   | <input type="checkbox"/> Internal / organisational factors   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A gap has been identified  | <input type="checkbox"/> A stakeholder has identified a need, eg by email, telephone etc                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Additional knowledge or information has become available to supplement the policy.     | <input type="checkbox"/> A serious or critical incident has occurred, requiring an urgent review.                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> External factors   | <input type="checkbox"/> Need for consistency in service delivery across programs and organisations.                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Policy is no longer relevant/current due to changes in external operating environment. | <input type="checkbox"/> Separate, stand-alone policy is now warranted   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> There are changes to laws, regulations, terminology and/or government policy.          | <input type="checkbox"/> A near miss has occurred, requiring a review to prevent a serious/critical incident in the future |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Changes to funding environment, including requirements of funding bod(y)ies            |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify).  |  |

**Additional Comments**

*[for example, policy now covers details related to new legislation].*

# Communications Policy

## 1. Purpose and Scope

**[insert organisation name]** is committed to effective dissemination and receipt of information and communication within the organisation and with consumers, carers, stakeholders, and the media.

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to **[insert organisation name]** in developing and implementing communication strategies. This policy applies to all Board members, staff, volunteers and students and encompasses:

- Purpose of communications
- Communication tools and mechanisms
- Liaison with the media.

This policy does not provide detailed guidance on:

- Feedback and complaints from consumers, stakeholders or employees – refer to the Feedback and Complaints Policy.
- Privacy and confidentiality – refer to the Privacy and Confidentiality Policy
- Partnerships and relationships with external parties - refer to the Integration Policy
- Management of organisation information - refer to the Information Management Policy
- For information about the use of **[insert organisation name]** images and branding – refer to the **[insert document name i.e style guide]**.

## 3. Principles

Communication systems and equipment will be used only for the purpose of achieving the organisation's objectives.

Clear, consistent and equitable communication within the organisation is essential for effective operations.

Communications are presented in plain English, wherever possible.

External communication, including with the media, aligns with the organisation’s strategic objectives.

**4. Outcomes**

Consumers and stakeholders are informed of, and consulted on, activities and operations.

External communication increases awareness and understanding of issues relevant to **[insert organisation name]**, consumers and carers.

Internal communication supports good knowledge management and operations within the organisation.

**5. Functions and Delegations**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Delegation/Task</b>
Board of Directors	<p>Endorse Communications Policy.</p> <p>Compliance with Communications Policy.</p> <p>Contribute to internal and external communication strategies and activities.</p> <p><u>President</u> Liaise with media, including developing and responding to media releases.</p>
Management	<p>Compliance with Communications Policy.</p> <p>Contribute to internal and external communication strategies and activities.</p> <p>Actively contribute/ write articles and collate items of interest for <b>[insert organisation name]</b>’s communications.</p> <p><u>CEO/Manager</u> Liaise with media, including developing and responding to media releases.</p> <p>Endorse draft media releases prepared by other staff.</p>

	<p>Oversee production of external communications.</p> <p><b><u>[insert position]</u></b>  Maintain operations of the website, and other promotional materials.</p>
Staff	<p>Compliance with Communications Policy.</p> <p>Contribute to internal and external communication strategies and activities.</p> <p>Actively contribute/ write articles and collate items of interest for <b>[insert organisation name]</b>'s communications.</p> <p><b><u>[insert position]</u></b>  Update content of the communications database.</p> <p>Production of the newsletter.</p>

## 6. Risk Management

**[Insert organisation name]** has mechanisms in place to ensure that communications are effective and regularly monitored.

All staff, volunteers, students and Board Members are made aware of this policy during orientation and are provided with ongoing support to assist them to effectively use internal communication systems.

This policy must be read in conjunction with the Privacy and Confidentiality Policy.

## 7. Policy Implementation

This policy is developed in consultation with all staff and approved by the Board of Directors. This policy is to be part of all staff, Board, volunteer and student orientation processes and all employees, Board, volunteers and students are responsible for understanding and adhering to this policy.

This policy should be referenced in relevant policies, procedures and other supporting documents to ensure that it is familiar to all staff and actively used. This policy will be reviewed in line with **[insert organisation name]**'s quality improvement program and/ or relevant legislative changes.

## 8. Policy Detail

### 8.1 Purpose of Communications

**[insert organisation name]** communicates for several purposes, to:

- Increase awareness of the organisation, its goals, its work, and its needs
- Enhance community understanding of its consumer target group and broader mental health issues
- Share knowledge with its stakeholders
- Share knowledge internally for effective organisational management
- Increase the profile of the **[insert relevant sector, e.g. community managed mental health sector]**.

Communications are undertaken not for the sole purpose of information distribution and receipt, but to be used to assist and support the achievement of **[insert organisation name]**'s strategic objectives.

### 8.2 Types of Communications

#### 8.2.1 Outgoing Communication

Outgoing communication is information and knowledge that is initiated, developed and distributed by the organisation for an external audience.

**[insert organisation name]** provides outgoing communications to:

- Consumers and potential consumers
- Members and potential members
- Funding bodies
- Engaged and potential consultants
- Partner organisations for project, policy, consumer support and other activities
- Peak bodies – state and national
- Mental health and broader community services sector organisations
- Government departments and branches
- Research and academic institutes
- Media.

#### Developing Outgoing Communications

**[insert organisation name]** conceptualises and develops effective communications structured around the following:

Component	For example
<b>What:</b> identify broadly what it is that is to be communicated	The value of community managed mental health services to the community.
<b>Message:</b> use a message(s) to communicate	Background paper highlighting the history, role and achievements of the sector.
<b>Audience:</b> identify who the audience is, adapt the message accordingly	Current and potential funders.
<b>Messenger:</b> identify who will do the communicating and why	Staff member – has content knowledge and writing skills.
<b>Mechanism:</b> how will the message be communicated	Hard copy paper forwarded to current funding bodies, electronic copy posted on the <b>[insert organisation name]</b> website and used in funding applications.
<b>Review/ evaluate:</b> was the message received, understood, did it create interest, was there any feedback?	Follow-up phone calls to several recipients seeking feedback.

**Mechanisms and Tools used for Outgoing Communication**

A range of mechanisms and tools are used to distribute outgoing communication.

**[insert organisation name] Website**

The website is a primary tool for distributing outgoing information to a broad audience. Information about **[the organisation]**'s goal, governance, membership, activities, current projects and news items is maintained by **[insert positions]**.

**[insert organisation name] Newsletter**

The digital **[or paper]** newsletter is produced **[insert frequency]** with a primary target audience of **[insert target audience]**. All staff contribute and write articles for the newsletter.

**Organisational Documents**

**[insert organisation name]** produces a number of organisation and project specific documents that provide information about its plans, achievements, and activities.

Documents such as annual reports, strategic plans, consumer brochures, and project background and implementation plans may be provided to consumers, members, stakeholders and funders with current information about **[insert organisation name]**'s activities, performance and plans. Organisational documents for outgoing communication are also to be distributed internally, to all staff and Board members.

### **Media Communication**

**[insert organisation name]** may produce or respond to media releases on behalf of the organisation. Media releases may be developed to promote an event or project achievement, advocacy on behalf of consumers, or to counter any negative media coverage relating to the mental health sector.

**[insert organisation name]** may partner with other organisations in producing or responding to a media release.

The **[insert organisation name]** CEO and Board President hold responsibility for liaison with the media.

## **Conference, Forum and Meeting Representation**

Board and staff members participate in numerous conferences, forums, and advisory groups representing **[insert organisation name]**. It is important to be clear that representation is for the organisation and not personal opinion, unless clearly stated.

Participation also allows for information gathering so that **[insert organisation name]** is better informed and better able to provide services for consumers.

## **Stakeholder Meetings**

**[insert organisation name]** staff participate in regular meetings with relevant stakeholders to provide support, share information about current projects and issues, and to gather feedback on services.

Regular contact with stakeholders is part of **[insert organisation name]**'s service delivery.

All staff are responsible for developing and maintaining effective relationships with stakeholders.

## **Branding and Corporate Image**

All outgoing communications must carry the **[insert organisation name]** name and/or logo, including letters, reports, project materials, emails, and policy and advocacy submissions. In line with organisational style branding guidelines

The organisation name and logo are copyright and must not be used for communications that are not directly related to the organisation.

[If applicable, The [Associations Incorporation Act 2009](#), under Section 41, quotes “*An association must not issue any letter, statement, invoice, notice, publication, order for goods or services or receipt in connection with its activities unless the association’s name appears in legible characters on the document.*”]

## **8.2.2 Incoming Communication**

Incoming communication is information and knowledge that is sought and/or received from an external source to the organisation. Incoming communication supports **[insert organisation name]** in achieving its goal, strategic plan and provision of services to consumers.

**[insert organisation name]** receives communications from the following sources:

- Consumers (potential, current, previous)
- Carers (potential, current, previous)
- Employees (potential, current, previous)

- Members and potential members
- Funding bodies
- Engaged and potential consultants
- Partner organisations for project, policy, consumer support and other activities
- Peak bodies – state and national
- Mental health and broader community services sector organisations
- Government departments and branches
- Research and academic institutes
- Media
- Associations and professional organisations.

### **Mechanisms and Tools used to Receive Incoming Communication**

A range of mechanisms and tools are used to receive incoming communication. Mechanisms described above in ‘outgoing communication’ also provide opportunities for **[insert organisation name]** to receive information. Other incoming communication mechanisms include:

#### **Member, Consumer and Stakeholder Consultation**

In recognition of the role members, consumers and stakeholders play in assisting in strategic endeavours regular consultation with consumers, members and stakeholders is undertaken. Consultation may be informal or through formal means such as surveys, research, contracting consultants, etc. Consumers may also participate in advisory/steering groups as a mechanism for providing expert input into activities and services.

#### **Subscriptions**

Board members and staff actively source information through numerous email and hard copy subscriptions to inform activities and services at the organisation. A list of current subscriptions both hard and email are detailed in the **[memberships and subscriptions document]**.

### **8.2.3 Internal Communication**

Internal communication is information and knowledge that is shared within **[insert organisation name]**. Effective internal communication is essential for good organisational management. All Board, staff, volunteers and students are responsible for actively contributing to communication strategies and activities.

#### **Mechanisms and Tools used for Internal Communication**

A range of mechanisms and tools are used for internal communication.

#### **Staff, Team and Project Meetings**

Staff, team and project meetings provide opportunity for information sharing and decision making on a range of project and operational issues for the organisation. All staff are required to attend the **[insert organisation name]** staff meetings and relevant staff attend team and project meetings.

### **Board Meetings**

Board meetings support effective governance for the organisation. Board meetings may also include time for staff (and occasionally contracted consultants) to communicate with the Board on a range of project and operational issues for the organisation.

### **Work Plan and Review Meetings**

Work plan and review meetings between staff, volunteers, students and supervisors allow communication on specific project and activity planning, achievements and challenges.

### **Email and Electronic Calendars**

The use of email and electronic calendars is essential for effective communication amongst staff, volunteers and students. These tools are a simple and effective way to share information about projects, meetings, internal business/operations, external sector news and activity. These tools also provide a record and may be considered formal documentation.

All staff, volunteers and students are expected to use email and share electronic calendars.

Information is also shared internally through other communication mechanisms such as **[insert details]**.

## **8.3 Use of Internet, Email and Phone**

All employees, students and volunteers will use communication systems and equipment for **[insert organisation name]** purposes only.

Employees, students and volunteers will comply with all laws when using **[insert organisation name]** communication systems.

Using **[insert organisation name]**'s computer resources to seek out, access, store or send any material of an offensive, obscene or defamatory nature is prohibited and may result in disciplinary action.

All emails and internet use, including specific websites visited may be monitored.

The Guidelines for Computer, Internet, Email & Phone Use provides details for staff and consumers on the appropriate use of telecommunications at the organisation.

## **8.4 Record Keeping**

All documents bearing the **[insert organisation name]** name and/or logo, including digital and electronic materials, must be saved in the electronic and hard copy filing systems, as per the Information Management Policy.

## **9. References**

### **9.1 Internal**

Guidelines for Computer, Internet, Email & Phone Use  
Information Management Policy  
Integration Policy  
Privacy and Confidentiality Policy

### **9.2 External**

#### **Legislation**

Associations Incorporation Act 2009 (NSW)  
Do Not Call Register Act 2006 and Do Not Call Register Regulations 2006 (Cth)  
Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002 (NSW)  
Mental Health Act (NSW) 2007  
Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)  
Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW)  
Spam Act 2003 and Spam Regulations 2004 (Commonwealth)

#### **Websites**

Social Change Media [www.media.socialchange.net.au/using\\_media/Contents.html](http://www.media.socialchange.net.au/using_media/Contents.html)

The Plain English Campaign [www.plainenglish.co.uk](http://www.plainenglish.co.uk)

*This policy is adapted from the NADA Communications Policy.*

[http://www.nada.org.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=236&Itemid=44](http://www.nada.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=236&Itemid=44)

### **9.3 Quality and Accreditation Standards**

#### **EQUIP4**

Provided by the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards (ACHS)

Standard 2.3: Information management systems enable the organisation's goals to be met.

Criterion 2.3.2: Information and data management and collection systems are used to assist in meeting the strategic and operational needs of the organisation.

Criterion 2.3.3: Data and information are used effectively to support and improve care and services.

Criterion 2.3.4: The organisation has an integrated approach to the planning, use and management of information and communication technology.

## **EQUIP5**

Provided by the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards (ACHS)

Standard 2.3: Information management systems enable the organisation's goals to be met.

Criterion 2.3.2: Corporate records management systems support the collection of information and meet the organisation's needs.

Criterion 2.3.3: Data and information are collected, stored and used for strategic, operational and service improvement purposes.

Criterion 2.3.4: The organisation has an integrated approach to the planning, use and management of information and communication technology (I&CT).

## **Health and Community Service Standards (6<sup>th</sup> edition)**

Provided by the Quality Improvement Council (QIC)

Standard 1.6: Knowledge (including research and the collection, storage and sharing of information) is managed in a systematic, ethical and secure way, and the organisation uses it to inform service review and development.

Evidence Questions: What is the evidence that:

- a) the organisation keeps up to date with current trends in its field and uses demographic and research data to improve outcomes for its consumers?

- b) cooperative work practices exist to share knowledge within the organisation?
- c) information is stored in an organised way that is easily accessible to approved staff and consumers and, when necessary, is secure and legally compliant?
- d) protocols on the sharing of information about consumers exist and are used?
- e) data on the use of services and advances in the field are collected and used in planning, evaluation and quality improvement?
- f) staff are involved in the collection, analysis and use of data to improve services and programs and time is allocated for these activities?

#### **9.4 National Standards for Mental Health Services**

Criterion 8.9 The organisation manages and maintains an information system that facilitates the appropriate collection, use, storage, transmission and analysis of data to enable review of services and outcomes at an individual consumer and organisational level in accordance with Commonwealth, state / territory legislation and related Acts.

#### **9.5 Recovery Oriented Service Self-Assessment Tool (ROSSAT)**

Evidence items are:

Item 2.3: Supervision, both formal and informal, is available and used to discuss:

- Relationship development and maintenance
- Respectful recovery oriented practice
- Providing holistic support that is responsive to diversity
- Supporting self-directed care by providing information and choice, fostering engagement and maximising personal responsibility
- Incorporating and maintaining a belief in recovery in service provision
- Obtaining relevant and up to date information, share information in appropriate formats, and educate people on how to access information
- Enhancing a person's participation and social inclusion

Item 2.5: Leaders advocate, champion and model:

- Human rights informing service delivery
- The consumers' voice as central to care and service provision
- The belief that recovery is possible and probable for every person
- Hopeful and optimistic attitudes in dealing with workers, consumers and carers.

Item 2.6: Management:

- Is aware of Commonwealth and State policy directions around recovery orientation and integrates these into practice

- Identifies information relevant to the organisation to increase the knowledge base on recovery and recovery oriented practice, including information for consumers, carers and their families.

Item 2.8: Management provide information to workers about other services available in the community relevant to the organisation and consumers.

Item 3.7: Workers recognise that self-direction and self-responsibility are important in a person's recovery journey, and that providing them with choice and information inspires recovery and enhances control over decision-making.

Item 3.8: Workers make information available in different formats to ensure that it is accessible to all people using the services.

Item 3.17: Workers support the person, their family and carers to make informed decisions by sharing information on services, activities in the community that support their participation, social interactivity and recovery, including peer networks and support groups, therapies and supports, and supporting consumers to find information from other sources.

Item 3.20: Workers seek to exchange information with other organisations and agencies to ensure continuity of care (with consent).

Item 4.2a: Policies and procedures are in place that relate to privacy and confidentiality, the obtaining of consumer consent to share their information and communication techniques available.

Item 4.3a: The organisation provides the opportunity for ongoing training including understanding recovery:

- That each person will be able to embark on their recovery when they are ready
- That relapse is common and normal in recovery and is seen as an opportunity for developing resilience
- How to support recovery through positive risk-taking
- How to sustain hope for a person's recovery
- The importance of people's lived experience in informing service delivery and informing training.

Item 4.3b: The organisation provides the opportunity for ongoing training including in relationships:

- How to explore and identify appropriate boundaries
- Prioritising time for and undertaking relationship building
- Identifying relationships that are supportive of recovery, and those that may hinder a person's recovery
- Trauma informed care and practice
- Communication skills, including listening and negotiation
- Dealing with conflict, violence, hopelessness and/or challenging behaviour
- Working with people who are reluctant to be involved in decisions around their treatment and care
- The importance of attitudes such as hope and optimism

- How to explore and relate one's own life experiences to strengthen.
- The complaints process.

Item 4.3d: The organisation provides the opportunity for ongoing training on consumer self-directed care:

- How to facilitate the delivery of consumer self-directed services, including how to maximise consumer choice and control in their recovery
- Information on the individual, non-linear nature of recovery and how this affects the level of support provided by workers

Item 4.3e: The organisation provides the opportunity for ongoing training on the obtaining and sharing of knowledge and information including:

- Protocols relating to privacy and confidentiality
- Relevant legislation changes
- Innovative recovery based practice
- New and existing relevant services
- Sharing accessible information and resources relevant to consumers, their families and carers.

Item 5.3: Consumers are provided with the regular opportunity to evaluate relationships, respectful practice, perceptions of stigma and discrimination experienced from workers within the organisation, the consumer self-directed focus, the belief in consumer's recovery, the obtaining and sharing of knowledge and information, the quality and relevance of information provided and participation and social inclusion.

Item 5.3e: Consumers are provided with the regular opportunity to evaluate the obtaining and sharing of knowledge and information, the quality and relevance of information provided, the appropriateness of the format information is provided in and the ability to understand information that is provided.

## **9.6 NSW Disability Services Standards (DSS)**

N/A