

## Appendix A - Definitions and Terminology

The following are terms used in this report and across the field of literature on consumer participation and peer support.

**Consumer** – formally defined in the Macquarie Dictionary as ‘someone who uses a commodity or service’, this is a contested term in the literature on participation. Many argue that because the activities of a ‘consumer’ are typically linked to neo-liberal concepts around personal choice and opportunity and therefore seen by many as less relevant to social services in which overwhelming demand and limited supply/resources means individuals in reality, have little choice.

In the ‘Consumer Participation Resource Kit’ specifically designed for homelessness services, consumer is defined as:

‘someone who uses, has used, or is eligible to use housing, homelessness and support services, including those refused services and those who have refused services. This may include carers and family members when relevant’ { HomeGround Services and Rural Housing Network, 2008:3}.

In recent years, ‘consumer’ is also the term used by the Victorian government in both the homelessness and other service sectors when referring to service user rights and the various ‘service charters’ and standards that have been developed. Across health, mental health and disability sectors the term ‘consumer’ is strongly embraced as it suggests the notion of individual empowerment and choice, something that these sectors are promoting as a key element in their service system design and resource management.

**Peer** – typically ‘peers’ are defined as people with an equal standing from the same social or societal group with shared characteristics that provide them with a shared experience or shared interest (Studies 2006) (Research 2010). The term ‘peer’ is also seen to suggest a relationship of equals, rather than one in which one party holds power or control over another.

‘Peer support’ is commonly described in the mental health literature as ‘any organised support provided by and for people with similar conditions, problems or experiences’ (O’Hagan 2011) and can take many different forms from one-to-one personal support, group or organisation based support, or even support provided by a consumer-controlled organisation. ‘Peer education’ is a more formalised type of program requiring participants to receive some sort of training before they become involved in helping to teach or share information with others with similar backgrounds or experiences to their own {Community Help and Development, 2013}

**Participation** – the literature identifies many different forms and levels of participation across the different human service sectors, but a clear and cross-sector definition is ‘a way of enabling people to participate in all the decisions and actions that affect their lives’ (Group 2013). Different forms of participation include social participation, public participation, and individual participation (Brodie, Cowling et al. 2009). The literature on participation commonly draws a distinction between ‘consumerist’ and ‘democratic’ forms of participation, with the former related to the notion of choice and market forces driving some form of decision-making and the latter related to notions of civil rights and citizenship (Moriarty, Rapaport et al. 2007). The democratic approach to participation is also often either explicitly or implicitly linked to notions of shared decision-making and the transfer of power and control.

**Other terms** - ‘*engagement*’ and ‘*involvement*’ are other terms commonly used and sometimes interchanged with participation. Engagement typically refers to a more continuous or ongoing

process, whereby consumers are actively invited to become involved in decision-making and planning partnerships rather than one-off or less meaningful interactions (TASCOSS 2012). In the United States, '*consumer integration*' is commonly used in homelessness policy discussion as a term that identifies the intention to involve consumers or service users in a range of decision-making processes, from individual care plans to program and policy development {Barrow et al, 2007}. In the United Kingdom the literature typically refers to 'service users' or 'clients' rather than consumers.

The term '*co-production*' is also gaining popularity in government and academic debates around service provision, referring to a means of personalising service provision by directly including the 'voice and choice' of service users in decision-making processes (Brodie, Cowling et al. 2009) . This takes the concept of participation to the next level, suggesting that consumers or service users have become an essential and active part of the service delivery process, rather than passive recipients and possibly people worth involving.