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Consumers Can Ask

A resource to assist
discussion about
treatment, discharge
planning and post
discharge support

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DEVELOPMENT OF THIS RESOURCE

This resource was originally developed in 2016 as a companion to the Carers Can Ask resource. In 2025 this resource was reviewed and updated using co-design principles by lived experience workers (consumer backgrounds) as well as clinicians and Nexus Integrated Care staff. A grant from St Vincent's Health Australia Health Equity Program funded this update. Thank you to all consumers, staff and agencies involved. We thank all who have contributed to this resource and hope it is of use to consumers.

Working Party Acknowledgement: Emer Diviney, Lisa Idris, Beth King, Simon Kroes, Joshua Mammolito, Kevan Myers, Melissa Petrakis, Lachlan Preece, Chelsea Taylor and Sharon Williams.

Graphic design adaptation: Mirah Vanheems-falovic.

If you'd like adapt the content for your service please contact Nexus Integrated Care on nexus@svha.org.au.

RECOGNITION OF LIVED AND LIVING EXPERIENCE

We would like to recognise all people with lived and living experience (LLE), specifically mental health consumers, AOD consumers, and family-carer-supporters. To those who use services, we recognise your invaluable contributions to service improvement and to keeping services accountable by asking the questions that need to be asked.

We are immensely grateful to all those with LLE who contributed to this booklet, ensuring that it continues to align with the values of consumers and family-carer-supporters. To all the people with LLE who will read and use this booklet, we thank you. Using this booklet means engendering greater engagement with services, leading to deeper conversations.

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DEVELOPMENT OF THIS RESOURCE



WHY THIS RESOURCE EXISTS

Mental health conditions and alcohol and/or other drug use commonly occur together and impact on each other in various ways. Treatment services need to take these issues into account when providing care and support. People with direct experience of mental health issues or alcohol and/or other drug issues and who are using, or have used health services, are referred to as consumers. Consumers come from all walks of life in Australia. While not all consumers identify with the word 'consumer', it is a common collective term and has been chosen for this booklet.

Consumers Can Ask (ConCA) was developed to empower you, the consumer, to ask questions and provide a sense of agency over your treatment, discharge planning and post discharge support.

GENERAL TIPS

Having a good relationship with your care team and services can make it easier to get the most out of treatment and support services.

When asking questions, treat people with the same respect you expect them to give you. Some consumers experience stigma or negative labels when they ask questions. While this shouldn't happen, having open, respectful communication with your care team may reduce the likelihood of a negative reaction.

The information is intended to be used at hospital and community mental health services and alcohol and other drug services.

It is a human right to be informed and listened to. This resource offers suggested questions aimed at opening up conversations about the services you use and others you might find helpful. These questions might not have simple answers, but they can spark important discussions about your care and recovery and some questions might not apply to you at all.

The idea is to take the questions you need from this resource, to get the most out of your time with mental health and drug and alcohol services. Remember, as the consumer, you can always ask questions – it is your right to be informed about your care.

If you don't get the service and care you expect, you have the right to speak with another staff member at the service or to make a complaint. The avenues to lodge a complaint are: directly to the service involved, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission (for complaints about public sector mental health services) or the Health Complaints Commissioner (for complaints about public and private sector alcohol and/or other drug services). Contact information for these services is on page 22 of this booklet.

NOTES/NEXT STEPS:

NOTES/NEXT STEPS:

QUESTIONS TO ASK

General Treatment

- Can I get a statement of my rights?
- What are my treatment options, both medical and non-medical and how do they work?
- Do I need to do anything (e.g., access a withdrawal service) before I can access this service?
- How will I be involved in treatment planning?
- In what circumstances do I need to give informed consent?
- In what ways can we communicate information (e.g., through conversation, video, written material, websites, or testimonials)?
- Can you explain my diagnosis and why you believe I have this condition? Could it be anything else?
- Can you arrange a second opinion for me?
- What does life look like for people with this condition? What can I expect to happen going forwards?
- How might this condition change my behaviour or the way I think? What sort of things should I look out for?
- What assessments have been done, or are planned, in relation to mental health and alcohol and other drug use?
- Do you use a harm reduction approach? Or is it an abstinence based program?
- What treatment have I received and why?
- How will I know if the treatment is working?
- Can we talk about my strengths? I'd like to build on them.
- Is this service public or private?
- How much will this service cost?
- Are the medications I am prescribed on the Pharmaceuticals Benefits Scheme? If not, are there alternatives that are cheaper? (See Page 8 for further medication questions).
- What will you do if I miss an appointment?
- Have I met the new clinician/ GP/ support worker?
- Who has agreed to this plan?
- Is there a peer support worker I can talk to?
- How often am I expected to attend regular appointments?
- Is this treatment compulsory?
- How can I dispute a compulsory treatment order?
- What if I want to contact my family/ carers/supporters or friends?

Treatment Service Policies

- Is there a list of treatment service policies that I can have?
- What are the policies, including what I can and can't bring (e.g., mobile phone or laptop with internet access, personal medication, cigarettes, food)?
- How and when will medication be dispensed (e.g., time of day, self-administered, or by staff)?
- Are there any other restrictions I should be aware of (e.g., visitors, alcohol, or other drug use)?
- Am I allowed to leave when I want to or am I locked in?
- Will I have access to the internet here?
- Is there somewhere safe to store my valuables?
- Can I buy food or get it delivered here?
- How do you keep consumers here safe? Who do I tell if I feel unsafe?
- What facilities do you have? Is there a gym, smoking area or art room?
- Are there childcare options available?


Consent/Information Sharing

- What information am I entitled to?
- Are there any consent issues I need to be aware of?
- Will you assist me with completing an Advance Statement of Preferences form?
- How do I share information that I believe is relevant with the treating team?
- How will information about me be shared?
- Has my family/carer/supporter been asked how they would like to be involved?
- Has my family/carer/supporter been provided a link to the Carers Can Ask resource (see page 23)?

Talk it
through

FURTHER COPIES OF THIS RESOURCE CAN BE FOUND AT:


You can print the **Consumers** Can Ask from our website or engage with it interactively. Download a FREE copy of the resource from the Nexus website or use the QR code below:

 <https://www.svhm.org.au/our-services/departments-and-services/n/nexus/consumers-can-ask>



A RESOURCE TO GIVE TO YOUR FAMILY/ CARER/SUPPORTER:

You can print the **Carers** Can Ask from our website or engage with it interactively. Download a FREE copy of the resource from the Nexus website or use the QR code below:

 <https://www.svhm.org.au/our-services/departments-and-services/n/nexus/carers-can-ask>



COMPLAINTS

If you don't get the service you expect, you have the right to ask to speak with another person at the service or to make a complaint to the service or the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission (for complaints about public sector mental health services) or Health Services Complaints Commissioner (for alcohol and drug services).

Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission

You can contact the commission if you have a complaint about a public mental health service.

1800 246 054

 <https://mhwc.vic.gov.au>

Health Complaints Commissioner

You can contact the commission if you have a complaint about a general health service. 9.30am – 3.00pm / Monday – Friday

1300 582 113

 <https://hcc.vic.gov.au/contact>

Staff

- How is the service staffed?
- What are the qualifications of the staff working here (e.g., counsellors, other staff)? What are their skills, have they been through recovery?
- How many staff will be there at any one time?
- How often will I see the treating team?
- When are staff available (e.g., 24/7, weekdays/weekends)?

Daily Activities

- Will I be taught life skills (e.g., chores, washing, time management, cooking, shopping, routines, hygiene, budgeting etc)? If your service doesn't teach these, can you refer me to one that does?
- What activities will be offered? Are they mandatory or can I choose?
- Am I able to request reasonable adjustments to the activities if I have mobility, cultural, sensory or other barriers to participating in an activity?
- What groups are available?
- How do I continue my employment and/or education while accessing your service?
- Where am I able to exercise?

**I want to ask
a question
about...**

Medication

- How will the medication(s) assist my recovery?
- What side effects does the medication(s) cause?
- Does the medication interact with alcohol or other legal or illegal drugs?
- How long until the medication works?
- What pharmacotherapies do you offer to assist with alcohol and other drug use (e.g., Buprenorphine or Naltrexone)?
- How often will my medications be reviewed?
- How long will I need to be on them?
- Am I on the lowest possible effective dose?
- What should I do if I have a bad reaction?
- What should I do if I forget to take my medication?
- Is there a record of what medications have been tried? Has this been taken account of in my current treatment plan?
- Are there any alternative/herbal medications that might be suitable?
- Can I tell you about things that have changed since being prescribed medication that may affect how it works (e.g., stopping, starting, increasing, or decreasing smoking; taking herbal supplements; changes in medical condition)?
- Are there other ways/times of taking the medication that might be more effective?
- What treatments are available to manage side effects (e.g., medications; behavioural strategies such as exercise, diet, meditation, relaxation; self-help or support groups)?

Consumer Supports

- Who can I contact if I need support?
- What sort of support can I have from your service or others?
- Do I need a referral?
- Does the service have peer support workers or other lived experience staff?
- Do they do home visits?
- See the 'Resources' section on page 14 for other supports.

Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council (VMIAC)

Information and advocacy service for consumers with living/lived experience of mental health issues.

03 9380 3900

 <https://www.vmiac.org.au/>

Victorian Charter of Human Rights

Every person in Victoria has fundamental rights, freedoms, and obligations that are outlined in the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

1300 292 153


 <https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/for-individuals/human-rights/>

GENERAL LGBTIQ+ SUPPORT SERVICES AND RESOURCES

Switchboard Victoria – LGBTIQ+ Resource

Switchboard provides peer-driven general support services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender diverse, intersex, queer and asexual (LGBTQIA+) people, their families, allies and communities. 10am – 5pm / 7 days

1800 729 367

 <http://www.switchboard.org.au/>

Qlife

Peer support available 3pm-midnight each day.

1800 184 527


 <https://qlife.org.au/>

Rainbow Door

A free helpline for LGBTQIA+ people 10am - 5pm, everyday.

Call: 1800 729 367

Text: 0480 017 246

 <https://www.rainbowdoor.org.au/>

FIND SELF HELP SERVICES AND RESOURCES

Below is a range of services that people may find useful, depending on individual circumstances. Please consider the groups aims and approach to see if it's the right fit for you.

AA (Alcoholics Anonymous)

1300 222 222

 <http://www.aa.org.au/>

NA (Narcotics Anonymous)

1300 652 820

 <https://www.na.org.au/multi/contact-na/>

SHARC (Self Help Addiction Resource Centre)

03 9573 1700

 <http://www.sharc.org.au>

ASSIST Self help Guidelines

 <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241599405>

Centre for Clinical Interventions

 <https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Overview>

SANE Australia

Mental illness information for consumers, their carers, families and others

1800 187 263

 <https://www.sane.org/>

Involving Carers in My Treatment

- How does this service go about involving my family/carers/supporters?
- How will my family/carers/supporters be involved in my treatment?
- What if I don't want my family/carers/supporters involved in my treatment?
- Is there a carer peer support worker my family/carers/supporters can talk to?
- If I have to go to the Mental Health Tribunal or court, can I have my family/carers/supporters with me?
- What sort of support can my family, carers, or other supporters get for their own needs (e.g., financial, emotional, psychological)?
- Does your service use the Carers Can Ask resource? (See page 23 of this resource).

Culture

- Is your service culturally sensitive?
- Do you use interpreters and translation services?
- Are there culturally specific services that would be useful?
- Can my family bring in food or other culturally relevant things?
- Is there a prayer room?
- Are there any issues with me wearing culturally significant clothing?
- How do you support gender diversity within the program?
- Have staff at the service undertaken cultural sensitivity training?
- Has the service undertaken any cultural sensitivity training or accreditation eg Reconciliation Action Plan, Rainbow Tick?
- Do you have liaison staff or volunteers to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Faith Based Communities, LGBTQIA+?
- Is there a women's only ward? How do you address sexual safety?

Lapse and Relapse/ Things to be Aware of

- How will I know if I am becoming unwell?
- What might the early warning signs be?
- What does a lapse look like compared to relapse?
- What effect does alcohol or other drug use have on the possibility of mental health relapse?
- What effect does mental health have on the possibility of alcohol or other drug relapse?
- What do I do if I see any of these effects?
- Who should I contact?
- Can I have a written relapse plan or safety plan that covers both mental health and alcohol and other drug use?
- Can I make a written plan about what I want to happen if I become unwell (e.g. Advance Statement of Preferences)?
- Can you talk with my family/carer/supporter about lapse and relapse so they know what to look out for and how to respond?

Risk Reduction

- Can you involve me in any risk assessments you do so we look at risks together and so I know you are taking into account protective factors?
- Can you inform me about ways to reduce risks (e.g., medication side effects, overdose, suicidality)?
- What is the likelihood that my mental health issues will get worse?
- What can I do to maintain my mental health?
- What do I need to think about in relation to mental health and alcohol and/or other drug use?
- What harm reduction services are available in the community?
- Can you provide me with Naloxone and explain how to use it?
- Has a risk assessment been recently completed? What were the results?
- Who can I contact if I need further help?

Independent Mental Health Advocacy (non-legal advocacy)

Confidential, free advocacy and information for those currently receiving, or at risk of, compulsory mental health treatment.

1300 947 820

 <https://www.imha.vic.gov.au/>

GENERAL ABORIGINAL HEALTH SERVICES AND RESOURCES

Victorian Aboriginal Health Service Family Counselling Services

Provides a range of culturally safe health services for Aboriginal people. .

03 9419 3000

 <https://www.vahs.org.au/family-counselling-service/>

GENERAL MULTICULTURAL SERVICES AND RESOURCES

Mental Health Tribunal Translating and Interpreting Service

131 450

 <https://www.mht.vic.gov.au/other-languages>

Action on Disabilities in Ethnic Communities

03 9480 7000

 <http://www.adec.org.au>


LEGAL SERVICES AND RESOURCES

Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022

 <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/as-made/acts/mental-health-and-wellbeing-act-2022>


Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 – Advance Statements of Preferences

An advance statement is a written document that can explain a persons preferences for various areas of their life such as any care or support they want to receive if they lose capacity to make decisions.


 <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health-and-wellbeing-act-handbook/advance-statements-of-preferences>

Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 – Nominated Persons

When someone gets ill they may need mandatory assessment or treatment. They can designate someone, often a carer, to support them as their 'nominated person'.


 <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health-and-wellbeing-act-handbook/supported-decision-making/nominated-support-persons>

Mental Health Treatment Orders and Legal Issues

 <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health-and-wellbeing-act-handbook/treatments-and-interventions/treatment-orders>

Mental Health Tribunal

Monitor and oversight of compulsory treatment.

 <https://www.mht.vic.gov.au/what-happens-tribunal-hearing>

Relevant Crisis Contacts

- Can you please give me crisis contact numbers for my area (e.g., Psychiatric Triage, DIRECTLine, Lifeline)?
- How do I know which one to call?
- When is it the right time to call?
- Is there any help that is 24/7?
- Do you have a guide on how to use these services?

Next Steps from this Service

- How will I be included in arrangements to leave this service/ discharge (e.g., why and when am I being discharged, who has been involved in making the decision, are the next steps considering both my mental health and alcohol and other drug issues)?
- Is there a written discharge plan?
- Who will receive a copy of the discharge plan (e.g., GP, other services, my carer)?
- Will I get a final copy of the discharge plan?
- What am I expected to do (e.g., medication, relapse plan, transport or making appointments)?
- What happens if I can't or don't do those things?
- Will I be able to contact you or ask for advice after I'm discharged?
- If not you, who or what service should I speak with?
- Is there a day program after discharge that I can go to?
- Are there groups in the community you can recommend?
- Can my family/carers/supporters have assistance in supporting me? What sort of assistance can they get?

In the
case of an
emergency
please dial
000

Returning to the Service

- Can I use this service again?
- When and under what circumstances can I use the service again?
- What is the process if I need to come back?
- Who do I contact?
- How will I access treatment after being discharged?
- Can I call this service even after being discharged?

Links with Other Services

- What services have you made referrals to?
- How is the referral progressing?
- Do I need to go to a GP/other service for another referral? Is there a clear, shared written plan of what each service will do and how they will communicate with each other and me?
- What do I need to do to follow up these referrals?
- What support can you give me to attend appointments?
- How can my family/carers/supporter help me with these referrals?
- See page 14 onwards for services and resources.

Anything Else?

- Is there anything else I need to know?
- Can you tell me where to get more information about mental health and alcohol and other drug issues?
- Where can I find out more?
- What self help resources are available? (See page 20 for self help resources).



Where to go..

SUICIDE SUPPORT

Lifeline

24/7 Crisis Support Line.

13 11 14

 <https://www.lifeline.org.au>

Suicide Call Back Service

1300 659 467

 <https://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au/>

Roses in the Ocean

Suicide prevention call back service staffed by people with lived experience.

 <https://rosesintheocean.com.au/sector-priorities-collaborations/peer-care-companion-warmline/>

NATIONAL DISABILITY INSURANCE SCHEME (NDIS) SUPPORTS

National Disability Insurance Scheme

Provides funding for people with disabilities

1800 800 110

 <https://www.ndis.gov.au/>

MHCSS support people with psychiatric disability to manage their self-care, improve social and relationship skills and achieve broader quality of life via physical health, social connectedness, housing, education and employment.

ACS0: For all Victorian regional areas

EACH: North, Inner East, East areas

Neami National: South West, North East, Inner North, Bayside and Frankston

Mind Australia


Wellways


**These numbers
will connect you
to...**

RESOURCES

This is a brief resource list designed to assist in starting a search for services. The information was correct at time of publishing but may change over time. You can always put the name of the service, or copy and paste from this document, into an internet search engine to get updated information.

FIND A HOSPITAL AREA MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING SERVICE:

 <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health-services/statewide-and-specialist-mental-health-services>

 <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health/about-victorias-mental-health-services>

OTHER MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AND RESOURCES:

13YARN

A crisis support line for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

13 92 76

 <https://www.13yarn.org.au/>

Beyond Blue

A range of mental health services including brief counselling 24/7

1300 224 636

 <https://www.beyondblue.org.au>

Headspace

Various mental health services for people aged 16 - 25

 <https://headspace.org.au/contact-us/>

Orygen

Mental health mental health service, for young people

03 9966 9100

 <https://www.orygen.org.au/contact>

FIND ALCOHOL AND/OR OTHER DRUGS SERVICES AND RESOURCES

For information on AOD Services

 <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/alcohol-other-drugs>

DIRECTLine

A statewide alcohol and other drug counselling, information and referral 24/7


1800 888 236

 <http://www.directline.org.au/service-finder>

YoDAA

24/7 hour free helpline for young people

1800 458 685

 <http://yodaa.org.au/>

Australian Drug Foundation

Various drug information resources

 <http://www.druginfo.adf.org.au/>

Harm Reduction Victoria

Various harm reduction resources


 <https://www.hrvic.org.au/>

Quit

Resources to assist smokers to quit smoking

13 78 48

 <http://www.quit.org.au/>



Who
can I
call?