

Quick Guide for Health Care for the Homeless Staff Supporting Consumer Governance

This guide is a compilation of information and insight provided by the National Consumer Advisory Board (NCAB) Founders Workgroup comprised of NCAB founders with over 100 years of combined experience in the field of consumer engagement and governance. Special thanks to NCAB Founders Workgroup members Joseph Benson, Valarie Dowell, Amy Grassetto, Art Rios, and Joanne Guarino. This guide was created by consumers, the language has an informal tone to make this information accessible to all.

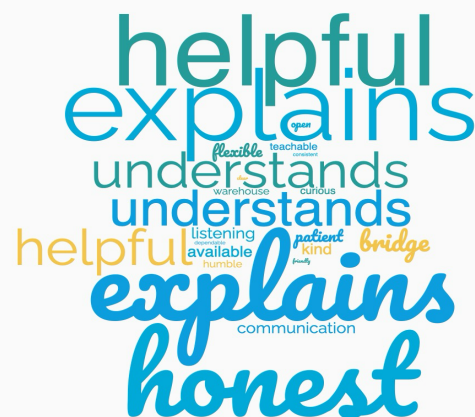
Consumer involvement in governance is a unique feature of the Health Care for the Homeless (HCH) programs and other federally support Health Centers. The National Health Care for the Homeless Council acknowledged in its founding principles that all people have the right to participate in decisions affecting their lives.ⁱ To this end, many HCH health centers designate staff members to coordinate and support consumer involvement in governance.ⁱⁱ This quick guide is for HCH health center staff members who are engaging individual consumers or groups of consumer leaders to meaningfully include consumers in health center governance.

Who should provide staff support for individual or groups of consumer leaders?

The Founders Workgroup of the National Consumer Advisory Board suggests that staff support come from someone who can share and receive insight into clinic operations and directly address concerns around services – such as a member of executive leadership or someone who has access to and is respected by executive leadership. An individual with a background in social work able to share understanding of how to create safe and accessible consumer spaces may also be helpful.ⁱⁱⁱ Some health centers are using staff members with lived experience to support the work of consumer governance.

What qualities are important in an HCH staff member working with a consumer governance group?

The Founders Workgroup of the National Consumer Advisory Board used the words pictured in the adjacent word cloud to describe the characteristics of a good staff liaison. Staff liaisons can come from any level of health center staff – administrators, administrative assistants, case managers, community health workers, outreach workers, etc. What is most important is not the position the staff member holds within the organization but their passion, desire, and ability to engage those with the lived experience of homelessness, including connecting them and their feedback with the staff of the health center.



In meetings of consumer leaders, what is the role of the HCH staff member vs. the consumer leaders (chair, co-chair, president, etc.)?

Staff Support	Consumer Leaders
Arrange meeting place (virtual or in-person).	Determine meeting frequency and format.
Share the meeting place, time, and agenda with participants in a timely manner. Ensure that this information is shared using modes of communication employed by the consumer attendees.	Assist with or lead recruitment of consumers to participate with the group.
Provide support required to facilitate consumer participation in the meeting such as transportation, technology support, childcare, meals, etc.	Regularly contact consumer leaders to identify barriers to participation and build trusting relationship.
In accordance with health center policy, provide and distribute compensation for consumer participants.	Create agenda for each meeting informed by staff support who share health center concerns, questions from staff, needed action, etc.
Prepare the agenda created by consumer leaders and distribute to attendees.	Facilitate all meetings. Request training and support from staff as needed.
Create and manage notes from all meetings. Ensure that action steps are re-visited and that all decisions and motions are properly recorded and memorialized. Appropriately store and organize all meeting notes and attendance records.	Review notes and, if applicable, by-laws, and ensure that the work of the group is moving forward and aligns with health center mission.
Model and share conflict resolution tools as needed.	Create and uphold guidelines for all meetings to encourage full participation, regular attendance, and meeting etiquette. Address concerns and areas of conflict with support from staff, if needed.
Provide training as needed.	Request training as needed.
Coordinate peer support/mentors for consumer leaders as requested.	Request support for members as needed. With staff support, develop strategies for helping consumer leaders succeed. Communicate areas of concern with staff.
Share requests, questions, updates, and critical information with consumer leaders. Report to health center leadership and relevant staff information from consumer leadership meetings. Serves as a conduit of information between consumers and health center staff, board, and funders, as needed.	Respond to health center requests, updates, and information shared. Communicate areas of concern, opportunities, etc. to health center staff through HCH staff liaison.

What is the staff liaison's role with health center staff and consumer leadership?



Staff liaisons serve as a warehouse of information for both health center staff and consumer leaders. Information is collected from the health center and shared with consumer leaders as needed. Feedback from consumer leaders is gathered, organized, and shared with health center staff. The staff liaison knows what information is needed to support the work of both groups and the best way to disseminate this information. The staff liaison maintains confidentiality for both groups as needed.

Staff liaisons serve as a bridge between health center staff, the board, funders, and consumer leaders. Staff liaisons meaningfully connect these groups which can be very different in communication styles, background, education, and culture. The staff liaison knows how to speak the language of both groups and interprets the needs, ideas, suggestions, feedback of each group. The staff liaison is loyal to both groups and seeks the success and health of both groups.



Important Reminders for Staff Supporting Consumer Governance

- Staff liaisons are not case managers or personal support staff for consumers in health center governance. Staff will need to clearly define their role with the consumer governance group and ensure that meetings with consumer leaders regarding health center governance do not become spaces where direct services are provided. Staff liaisons and consumer leaders must maintain clear boundaries.
- Staff liaisons who serve dual roles in the health center will need to find a way to emphasize when they are serving as a staff liaison and when they are providing other services. Using phrases such as, “Now I am wearing my consumer governance support hat” vs. “Now I am wearing my nurse manager hat” may be helpful for consumer leaders and health center staff who engage the staff liaison in a variety of roles.

- Staff liaisons must remember that their primary role is to support the development of consumer leadership and resist the urge to solve problems, resolve conflict, or manage workloads for consumer leaders unless their assistance is requested or required.
- Consumer engagement and the support of consumer governance should be valued by all health center staff. The staff liaison should have the support of executive leadership, providers, patient relations staff and others within the health center. All staff should be involved in the recruitment of consumer leaders and should be eager to receive and implement feedback received from the staff liaison on behalf of consumer leaders.^{iv}
- Staff liaisons may, at times, feel torn between the needs and desires of consumer leaders and health center staff. Staff liaisons should have supportive supervisors and teams who can process and help navigate these situations.
- Remember that as a staff member, you have power and that you always represent your organization.^v

The process of identifying, training, and supporting specific staff members to facilitate consumer governance is time consuming and costly, but it provides not only fidelity to HCH's social justice principles but also tangible benefits in the delivery and quality of care.^{vi}

Resources

[National Health Care for the Homeless Council Consumer Engagement Assessment Tool](#)

[National Health Care for the Homeless Council Consumer Advisory Board Directory Registration Form](#)

[National Health Care for the Homeless Council Consumer Advisory Board Manual](#)

[National Health Care for the Homeless Council Virtual Consumer Advisory Board Meeting Guidelines](#)

[National Health Care for the Homeless Council Consumer Employment in the Health Care for the Homeless Setting: Promising Practices](#)

[National Health Care for the Homeless Council Quick Guide on Consumer Engagement in Governance of Health Care for the Homeless Projects.](#)

[National Health Care for the Homeless Council Guidance for Consumer Advisory Board Staff Support](#)

[National Health Care for the Homeless Council If You Build It, Will They Come? Recruiting and Retaining Consumers Experiencing Homelessness in Health Center Governance](#)

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ⁱ National Health Care for the Homeless Council. [Evolution of the National Consumer Advisory Board: A Case Study in Consumer Leadership](#). December 2020.

ⁱⁱ National Health Care for the Homeless Council. [A Quick Guide on Consumer Engagement in Governance of Health Care for the Homeless Projects](#). September 2016.

ⁱⁱⁱ National Health Care for the Homeless Council. [A Quick Guide on Consumer Engagement in Governance of Health Care for the Homeless Projects](#). September 2016.

^{iv} National Health Care for the Homeless Council. [Consumer Advisory Board Manual](#).

^v National Health Care for the Homeless Council. [Guidance for Consumer Advisory Board Support Staff](#). August 2017.

^{vi} National Health Care for the Homeless Council. [A Quick Guide on Consumer Engagement in Governance of Health Care for the Homeless Projects](#). September 2016.