

# Definitions

A variety of terms and concepts are associated with community engagement, and it is important to be clear about the meaning and use of each.

## **Community engagement:**

... is people working collaboratively, through inspired action and learning, to create and realise bold visions for their common future. (*Tamarack, 2003*)

... an ongoing interactive process characterized by commitment to ever-changing community needs and interests". (*Industry Canada, 2002*)

... is the participation of members of a community in assessing, planning, implementing, and evaluating solutions to problems that affect them. As such, community engagement involves interpersonal trust, communication, and collaboration. Such engagement, or participation, should focus on, and result from, the needs, expectations, and desires of a community's members. (*Minnesota Department of Health, 2002*)

... refers to arrangements for citizens and communities to participate in the processes used to make good policy and to deliver on programs and services. (*Queensland Government, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, 2001*)

## **Consultation**

A process of gaining feedback on proposals, policies and strategies

In practice, often:

- *something we just have to do! (checking off the box)*
- *telling people what is going to happen!*
- *an attempt to placate the public*
- *just giving the appearance of listening*
- *simply about managing stakeholders (rather than extracting benefit)*

## **Other terms:**

### **Consumer participation:**

... means that people who either directly or indirectly use health services work in partnership with [the health provider] on issues relating to the 'health focus' of the population and the distribution of health services (Western Area Health, NSW).

### ***Consumer:***

... Patients and potential patients, carers, organisations representing consumers' interests, members of the public who are targets of health promotion programs and health care services. The key attribute that these people share is that they are not researchers or health professionals. Their main experience of health care is as a health consumer or community member (Divisions Evaluation Advisory Group). Consumers are people who have direct experience of receiving a health or community service.

### ***Public relations:***

... According to two American PR professionals Scott M. Cutlips and Allen H. Center, "PR is a planned effort to influence opinion through good character and responsible performance based upon mutual satisfactory two-way communication".

### ***Public participation:***

... Any process that involves the public in problem-solving or decision-making and uses public input to make better decisions (International Association for Public Participation - IAP2)

### ***The public:***

... The public is any individual or group of individuals, organisations or political entities with an interest in the outcome of a decision (IAP2 2005).

The public is not simply those people with an obvious and direct involvement in a decision. The public is anyone who thinks they will be affected or who has some interest in the outcome. The public includes those who perceive they will be affected as well as those who are directly affected.

### ***The community of interest***

... This is the group of people, wherever and whoever they are, who might have some role to play in making a better decision. It includes those from inside an organisation (internal stakeholders) and those from outside (external stakeholders).

