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The Asthma Foundation NSW and Consumer Engagement

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Abstract

Consumer engagement is not a new term or concept. However its importance and benefits have been gaining increasing attention and application worldwide. Consumer engagement commonly means having consumers involved in a process. This can be for a variety of reasons – such as policy, program, product and service development or for political purposes. The aim of consumer engagement is to involve the consumer – whether you are planning a new health service, developing a new program, building a new highway or testing a new toothpaste. The core of consumer engagement is that the consumer is engaged, consulted or participating. They are part of the development, planning or decision-making process.

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Statement of Problem

Consumer engagement is not a new term or concept. However its importance and benefits have been gaining increasing attention and application worldwide. Consumer engagement commonly means having consumers involved in a process. This can be for a variety of reasons – such as policy, program, product and service development or for political purposes. The aim of consumer engagement is to involve the consumer – whether you are planning a new health service, developing a new program, building a new highway or testing a new toothpaste. The core of consumer engagement is that the consumer is engaged, consulted or participating. They are part of the development, planning or decision-making process.

Stakeholder and Internal / External Environmental Analysis

The Asthma Foundation NSW conducted a literature review of Consumer engagement practices by government and not-for-profit sectors in Australia and overseas revealing a vast range of practices, frameworks and methodologies. While some consumer engagement practices have been effective, many practices were not evaluated and those that were did not show any benefits to the consumers or the organisations.

Most consumer engagement practices, frameworks and methodologies reviewed ensure the consumer was involved and considered in the planning and development of new policy, programs, services, policy development, marketing and other organisational activities, but only after they have been designed. This was a key issue.

Statement of Findings

Consumer engagement at the Asthma Foundation NSW will move away from current consumer engagement frameworks, practices and methodologies to adopt a social marketing approach to consumer engagement. Social marketing, like generic marketing, offers a logical planning process that involves consumer-oriented research, marketing analysis, market segmentation, objective setting and the identification of strategies and tactics. Programs, information, advocacy, policy, communications and marketing are responsive – based on understanding consumer wants and needs.

The new consumer engagement framework for Asthma Foundation NSW uses a social marketing approach for consumer engagement which places the consumer in the ‘decision-making role’ – unlike many consumer engagement frameworks reviewed in Australia and overseas where the consumer is involved and consulted and participating, but not deciding.

Strategies and Recommendations

The social marketing experience challenges us to think in new ways about consumers and program, information, marketing and communications design. It requires abandoning the expert mindset that has been traditionally adopted by health planning models whereby the programs, information and communications are intrinsically good – and if they fail to sell, the defect must reside in unformed or unmotivated consumers who need shrewder instruction or louder exhortation. A social marketing approach demands attention to the cultural appropriateness, adequacy, and accessibility of initiatives as they are being designed – rather than having to retrofit them after messages promoting them have been ignored.