WYNDHAM H3 ALLIANCE CLIENT & COMMUNITY VOICE FRAMEWORK

November 2023
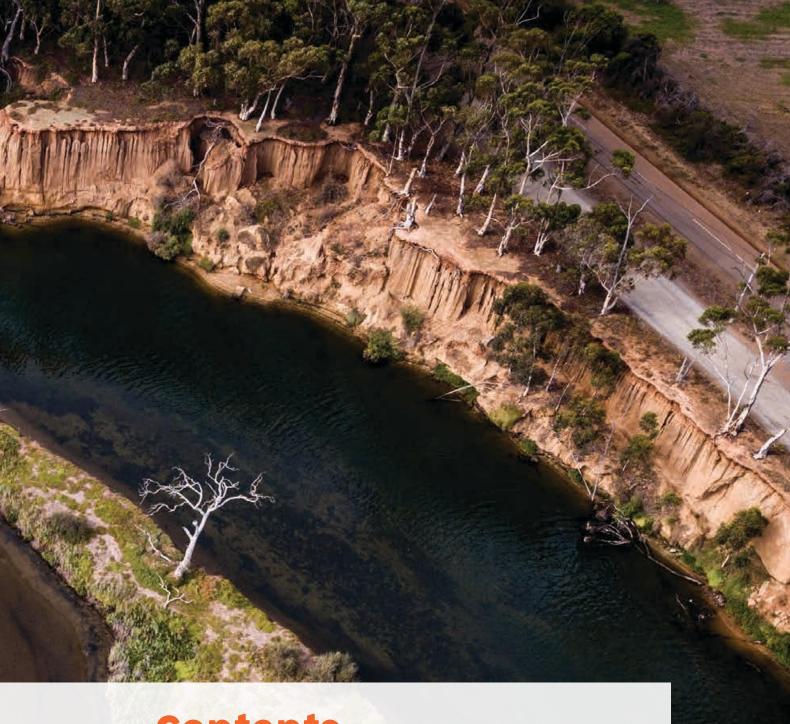
Acknowledgement of Country

Contents

Purpose

The Wyndham Health, Homelessness and Housing (H3) Alliance was established in 2007. It is a partnership of local service providers working together to address housing vulnerability by increasing housing supply, providing support, building capacity and addressing issues that lead to housing vulnerability for the Wyndham Community. The Wyndham H3 Alliance engaged the Public Value Studio to support the development of it's first Client and Community Voice Framework in 2023. This framework was developed following a desktop review of resources, mapping surveys, multiple workshops and conversations with the Wyndham H3 Alliance from June to November 2023.

This Framework outlines how the Wyndham H3 Alliance (the Alliance) will ensure that its clients and community have meaningful participation in the way it imagines, designs, delivers and evaluates its work.

In line with the Alliance's Collective Impact Model (Diagram 1) this Framework is part of its commitment to:

- rights-based and client-centred practice;
- collaboration and integration;
- delivery of evidence-based best practice;
- and agility, flexibility and transparency.

The Framework embeds listening to client and community voices in a way that will inform, and transform, the Alliance. It combines the practices of member organisations into one coordinated approach so that, by working together, it can:

- leverage opportunities;
- identify and share best practices;
- better understand client and community experiences;
- drive and support system improvement;
- better understand potential emerging needs across prevention, intervention, response and recovery; and as a result,
- better advocate for the people that are most impacted by their work.

Working in a collective impact model, the Alliance has the unique and strategic opportunity to leverage from a range of existing client and community voice activities which are already occurring through member organisations. This means that the potential for a more expansive understanding of sector-wide needs, opportunities and areas for advocacy is significant.
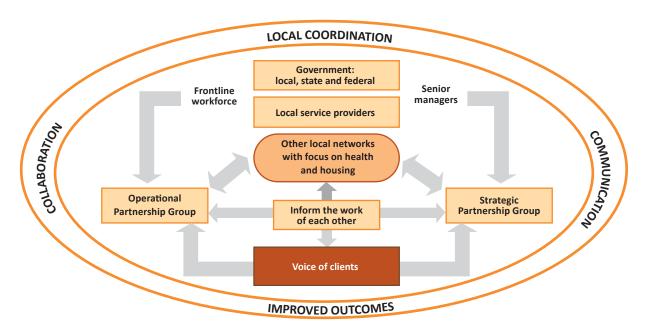

Diagram 1: Wyndham H3 Alliance Collective Impact Model

> " The Framework will provide us with confidence on how to engage with clients and community and empower them to make decisions about our collective services and impact.
>
> H3 ALLIANCE MEMBER

> " It will support reducing some barriers that clients face on a daily basis. It would also offer some power back to the clients. It will support the collaboration between services and support their effective communication so that clients feel well supported through their journey.
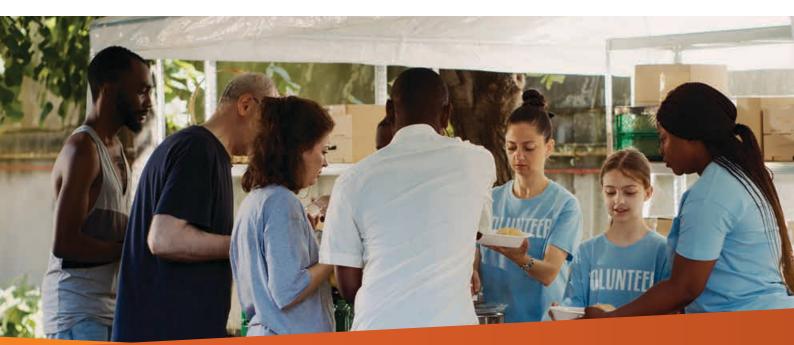>
> H3 ALLIANCE MEMBER

Whose Voice?

When the Framework references 'voice' it is referring to the voices of clients and community members who are or have been engaged with member organisations of the Alliance. This includes both current and future clients.

The Alliance recognises that some voices and groups of voices may be missing, or underrepresented and is committed to working towards addressing these gaps.

The Alliance understands that there is great diversity amongst the people it engages with and voices it listens to. The experiences of crises and social exclusion can make it challenging to obtain client perspectives in an appropriate and meaningful way. Tailored and multi-pronged engagement strategies for different groups are essential.

Many clients and community face barriers to participation. The H3 Alliance acknowledges that there may be people who are currently at risk of homelessness and may not be aware of, or not have accessed the supports available to them. For this reason, the Alliance will include strategies that engage with the broader community who may represent stakeholders, future users, or those that are currently disengaged with the supports and services available.

In addition to clients and community members, the Framework references to 'voice' includes other stakeholders such as state government, Victoria Police, local traders, schools and local organisations. It is expected that the learnings from engaging with client and community voice can be used to inform these stakeholders and support them in tailoring localised approaches to current needs.

Principles

Client and community voice makes an important difference to our work	• Evidence of the client and community voice is seen in how our initiatives are imagined, designed, delivered and evaluated. • Client and community voice is important for the quality, safety and sustainability of our initiatives.
We recognise the unique experiences and expertise of clients and community	• We appreciate that client and community voice provide insights that we would not otherwise be able to access, and it is important to recognise this contribution through valuing their time and input. • We work with an understanding of diversity and intersectionality, and therefore use different ways to engage different people, understanding that each person has a unique perspective and that there is no one shared experience. • We acknowledge that there are power imbalances between professionals and clients with lived experience and recognise that it is our responsibility to actively create safer spaces for genuine participation.
The client and community voice is everyone's role	• Everyone is encouraged to take responsibility for how client and community voice influences our work, including having clear understanding of what is required and expected from each of our roles. • We recognise that this requires building a coalition around the work, capacity building and suitable process and systems that are sustainable.
Client and community voice leads to action	• We don't just listen; we act on contributions and show accountability to the people we involve in the client and community voice. • We prioritise the needs, safety and well-being of the clients and community when designing approaches and strategies to engage with them.

Considerations

Below is an outline of Considerations for the Wyndham H3 Alliance (the Alliance) when applying the Framework's Principles:

Client and community voice makes an important difference to our work.

Level of influence

Each voice action needs to be developed with a clear understanding of what degree of influence is being offered to the client or community member. There may be some actions where the intention is solely to share information or consult with clients or community members. In this case, it should be clear that the ultimate decision-making will be made by the Alliance once it has considered all perspectives. Or, at times, the Alliance might decide that higher levels of influence are appropriate, and it will share decision-making or work in partnership with clients and community members. Whichever the case, the level of influence needs to be clearly established by the Alliance and communicated to people participating in the client and community voice activity. In addition, care should be given to ensure that engagement is not tokenistic or inconsequential.

An empowered approach to participation

An approach which treats clients and community members as 'peers' rather than 'others' is important. This stems from Nancy Fraser's 'parity of participation' approach which suggests that "all members of society should be able to interact with one another as peers"[1]. This approach ensures social justice underpins all actions and is aligned to the Alliance's rights-based approach which recognises that all clients have a right to be represented in decision-making that impacts them.

We recognise the unique experiences and expertise of clients and community.

Providing the proper supports for participation

The Alliance recognises that availability and accessibility of opportunities is important. However, this means more than simply providing opportunities for clients or community members to 'have a say', it means actively supporting them to participate. This includes continually reflecting on the barriers that people face to participation and putting in strategies to address those barriers. This will change from cohort to cohort, but also from individual to individual, because a range of different factors impact people's capacity to be meaningfully involved in these processes. Generally, it can involve considering aspects like cultural needs, literacy levels, the impact of trauma, geographical or social isolation and disadvantage

Building and sustaining trust

The Alliance recognises that in order to engage with more at-risk or systematically excluded clients and community members, greater attention needs to be given to building and maintaining trust. An engaging and respectful relationship between clients and staff of the Alliance underpins effective participation and is essential to 'capture the disillusioned'. Building trust can take time and is usually achieved with incremental positive experiences which create momentum. The Alliance recognises that staff who are working directly with clients are usually able to generate greater trust because they have established relationships, and therefore involving these staff members in client and community voice initiatives is essential.

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1. Fraser, N. (2008). Social justice in the age of identity politics: Redistribution, recognition, and participation. In Geographic Thought (pp. 72-89). Routledge.

A foundation of reciprocity

The Alliance recognises that clients and community members should benefit from sharing their experiences and expertise. Their contribution needs to be acknowledged so that there is a foundation of reciprocity in the relationship with the Alliance. While in some cases the most appropriate process is for some form of monetary recognition, like an honorarium, reciprocity can take on many different forms depending on the individual and the level of contribution expected from them. Other ways to recognise participants' contribution can be vouchers, formal acknowledgement or opportunities for professional development. Regardless of what is most appropriate, clients or community members should not be out of pocket for expenses related to participation, this includes offering support with transport, child minding, meals etc.

Being mindful of power imbalances

In seeking out client and community voices, the Alliance is also mindful of the systemic power imbalances present in many provider–client relationships. To create safer spaces and processes for genuine participation, the Alliance recognises that asking clients to be open and honest can place them in a vulnerable position. Therefore, it will always communicate to clients that they will not be disadvantaged for deciding not to participate and that they can opt out of engagement activities at any time.

In addition, the Alliance will be careful that its behaviours and language are sensitive and aimed at equalising power as much as possible. This includes working with staff from the Alliance, so they are better prepared and equipped to participate in engagement activities. The Alliance will pay careful attention to creating an environment where everyone feels different perspectives will be heard and supported .

The client and community voice is everyone's role.

A shared commitment

All members of the Alliance should feel confident in explaining and presenting how client and community voice is part of their work. This requires periodically reflecting on the purpose of this Framework as well as the outcomes to ensure consistent and collective commitment to embedding client and community perspectives in decision-making.

Clear accountabilities

While there are some consistencies, representatives from member organisations in the Alliance can sometimes change, and this may create confusion regarding responsibilities for client and community voice activities or delays with follow up actions. To avoid potential misunderstandings, client and community voice actions will be allocated to organisations rather than individuals.

In addition, those representing that organisation should ensure that any accountabilities are communicated to their colleagues to support continuity.

Understanding and building capacity

The Alliance recognises the importance of supporting staff from member organisations adequately with client and community voice activities. With each activity, consideration needs to be given to the resources available (time, financial and other) and what a reasonable expectation might be. Processes need to be designed to meet these capabilities in a way that best leverages the resources available.

The opportunities for professional development and building collaborative capacity will be explored so that the Alliance is building a more sustainable model for its practices going forward.

Client and community voice leads to action.

Decision making powers

The level of authority and decision-making powers representatives have in their respective organisations needs to be considered regarding setting reasonable expectations around accountability. When planning conversations and activities which involve client and community voice, consideration should be given to who the most suitable organisational representative is for the specific discussions, irrespective of usual attendance at meetings.

Collective action

Working in a collective action model, the Alliance has the unique and strategic opportunity to leverage from a range of existing client and community voice activities which are already occurring through member organisations. This means that the potential for a more expansive understanding of sector-wide needs, opportunities and areas for advocacy is significant. Recognition of this potential, and the transformation it can bring, is a driver for the Alliance's' ambitions through the Framework.
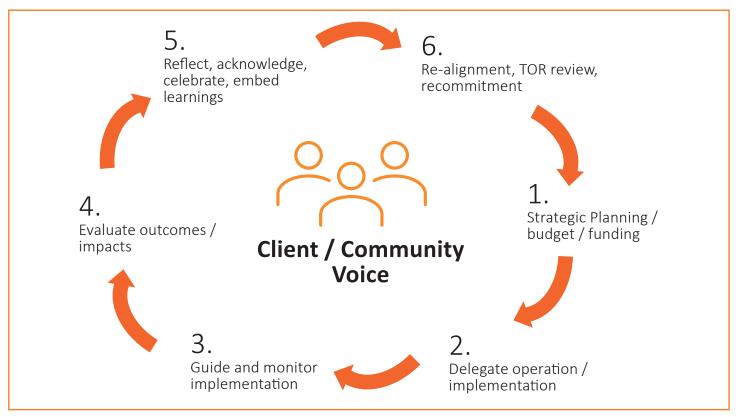
Implementation

Diagram 2: Wyndham H3 Alliance Strategic Cycle

How will the Framework be implemented?

As illustrated in the diagram 2 above, the Terms of Reference for the Alliance show that client and community voice will be at the centre of each of its six strategic partnership group meetings throughout the year. This means that client and community voice will be integrated into all the decisions of the Alliance going forward.

That said, the scope of the client and community voice actions will differ with each meeting and potential new initiative.

Decision-making on the scope of the actions will depend on questions such as:

• What are the expected benefits for including client and community voice?

• What is most appropriate approach and level of influence for this decision?

• What are the capabilities of the Alliance for this action?

For some decisions, it may be appropriate to refer to existing results from the client and community voice activities of member organisations; but for others, it may be more beneficial to design a tailored client and community voice activity.

In contrast to frameworks that are designed for one organisation, responsibility for the implementation of this Framework is distributed across several organisations. As part of the Framework implementation, some actions may require the collaboration of all members in the Alliance, but for other actions it might be more appropriate that only a few members provide input. As already occurs with other initiatives in the Alliance, what is implemented, who is responsible and how the resources allocated will need to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

As with the Terms of Reference for the Alliance, decision making for all client and community voice activities will be made through consensus. If a consensus cannot be reached, the Alliance will adhere to the process outlined in Item 4.4 Decision Making in its Terms of Reference.

Existing client and community voice activities

The implementation of this Framework will leverage existing client and community voice actions of the Alliance. These include a variety of activities that collect feedback and input at an individual, programs and services, organisation-wide and sector-wide level. Some of these activities include:

- 7 program specific advisory committees
- 5 organisations that currently involve peer-workers in program or service design and development
- 7 organisational level client advisory committees
- 6 organisations with established community consultation processes for their strategic planning and policy development
- 4 organisations with peer workers involved in governance activities
- 2 ambassador programs
- 4 organisations that have client advisory roles in networks or alliances
- 8 organisations that currently have community consultation process for input into sector-wide policy development, strategic planning and advocacy

Potential strategies

A variety of actions to implement the Framework were explored, including[2]:

- Standing Agenda Item to reflect on successes of client and community voice and share ideas for best practices.
- Workshops with members of the each of the Alliance's advisory committees and peer workers to discuss key strategic planning issues or emerging advocacy trends. These can be organised on an ad-hoc basis and should be based on distinct topics in order to get the most impact from discussion. If appropriate, invite members of Council's People's Panel to attend.
- Findings or trends from each of the organisations' client and community voice activities are compiled and analysed for emerging themes on a quarterly or bi-annual basis.
- Clients or community members are included in developing and presenting advocacy representations to government, media, stakeholders or the broader community.
- Integrate a client and community voice process in the Alliance's strategic planning.
- Workshops with SPG, OPG and staff involved in each organisation's client and community voice initiatives to collate and discuss the Alliance's collective impact outcomes including evaluation measures e.g. intake services, food scarcity, pilot programs etc.
- A consistent evaluation method (e.g. survey) is created and distributed by each organisation so it can be collectively analysed – similar to WSLAN but specifically for the Alliance.
- Opportunities for participation in client and community engagement activities amongst Alliance members are shared (e.g. attendance at the Salvation Army community lunches).

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2. When designing and implementing these initiatives, a review of the earlier 'Considerations' section is recommended. Also, privacy and ethics considerations will need to be resolved prior to commencing some of these actions so that any data that is collected and stored in the appropriate manner.

Measuring Success

Measuring the impact of the client and community voice actions is important because it builds a greater understanding around the value and benefits of this work. It also makes sure that actions are integrated into the work of the Alliance and are always clear and assessed for continuous improvement.

The measures proposed below are examples of how the Alliance can identify and consider the outcomes of client and community voice actions. Measures include:

- There is evidence that client and community voices are actively sought, valued and acted on throughout all stages of the Alliance's work (e.g. in Alliance minutes and reports).
- There are a range of different ways the Alliance draws on client and community voice, including different channels for client input.
- The Alliance is continually reflecting on ways to improve how clients and community inform its work.

- Recommendations and themes identified through client and community voice activities are explored and trialled, leading to action and driving change.
- Clients and community members who participate in activities feel that their input is valued and feel empowered to influence decisions of the Alliance.
- There are effective feedback loops with clients and community who have been engaged with the Alliance.

Endnotes:

i The North and West Metropolitan Homelessness Local Area Service Network's *Cared For Enough To be Involved Client Participation Guide*, contains various suggestions for tailoring participation strategies to different groups and is a useful resource for this aspect.

ii The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing's *Client voice framework for community services* has a useful table on p. 26 regarding 'addressing power imbalance' with a range of suggestions to consider. https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/client-voice-framework-community-services

Wyndham H3 Alliance: Client and Community Voice Framework

Principles	What this looks like:
Client and community voice makes an important difference to our work	• Evidence of the client and community voice is seen in how our initiatives are imagined, designed, delivered and evaluated. • Client and community voice is important for the quality, safety and sustainability of our initiatives.
We recognise the unique experiences and expertise of clients and community	• We appreciate that client and community voice provide insights that we would not otherwise be able to access, and it is important to recognise this contribution through valuing their time and input. • We work with an understanding of diversity and intersectionality, and therefore use different ways to engage different people, understanding that each person has a unique perspective and that there is no one shared experience. • We acknowledge that there are power imbalances between professionals and clients with lived experience and recognise that it is our responsibility to actively create safer spaces for genuine participation.
The client and community voice is everyone's role	• Everyone is encouraged to take responsibility for how client and community voice influences our work, including having clear understanding of what is required and expected from each of our roles. • We recognise that this requires building a coalition around the work, capacity building and suitable process and systems that are sustainable.
Client and community voice leads to action	• We don't just listen; we act on contributions and show accountability to the people we involve in the client and community voice. • We prioritise the needs, safety and well-being of the clients and community when designing approaches and strategies to engage with them.

Considerations	Measures
Level of influence - each action is developed with a clear understanding of its level of influence on decision-making. An empowered approach to participation- all participants are treated as peers, acknowledging their right to participate in decisions which impact them.	Recommendations and themes identified through client and community voice activities are explored and trialled, leading to action and driving change.
Providing the proper supports for participation- accessibility of opportunities means continually reflecting on, and addressing, barriers to participation. **Building and sustaining trust** - is critical for engaging with more at-risk or systematically excluded community members. **A foundation of reciprocity**- participants should benefit from sharing their experiences and expertise. **Being mindful of power imbalances**- to create safer spaces and processes for genuine participation, the Alliance recognises that asking clients to be open and honest can place them in a vulnerable position.	There are a range of different ways the Alliance draws on client and community voice, including different channels for client input. Clients and community members who participate in activities feel that their input is valued and feel empowered to influence decisions of the Alliance. There are effective feedback loops with clients and community who have been engaged with the Alliance.
A shared commitment- all members of the Alliance feel confident discussing how client and community voice is part of their work. **Clear accountabilities**- to each organisation to avoid misunderstandings around responsibility for action. **Understanding and building capacity**- the importance of supporting staff to deliver actions is recognised.	Evidence that client and community voices are actively sought, valued and acted on in Alliance's work (e.g. in minutes and reports).
Decision making powers- consideration is given to suitable organisational representatives for specific discussions, irrespective of usual attendance at meetings. **Collective action** - the unique and strategic opportunity to leverage from a range of existing client and community voice activities and its potential for transformation is recognised.	The Alliance is continually reflecting on ways to improve how clients and community inform its work.