



# Enacting policy in mental health promotion and consumer participation

Kathleen Stacey and Sandy Herron

## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Over the last decade Australia has established and endorsed sound policy and strategy documents under the National Mental Health Strategy. However, the enactment of proposed levels of consumer involvement in effective and respectful ways is yet to be fully witnessed in reality. This issue requires sustained attention where barriers need to be named and understood in order to move forward and build on past successes. This paper addresses this issue and offers some responses to the following question: What does a commitment to enacting consumer involvement mean for mental health promotion practice? **Conclusions:** Despite progress, consumer involvement in mental health promotion work, like the mental health field in general, is yet to reflect national visions. Barriers include: structural issues and insufficient education and training to support workers putting policy into practice; lack of clarity about who is a consumer; the many difficulties consumers face in progressing mental health consumer agendas; and disagreement on how consumers understand what constitutes 'mental health.' In order to embody proposed commitments attention must be paid to: the process of engagement, dialogue and liaison with consumers; advocating and facilitating active involvement; an understanding of partnership accountability; and active engagement with rigorous evaluative processes.