



SOUTH WESTERN SYDNEY AREA HEALTH SERVICE

Consultation Guidelines

What Is Consultation?

Consultation is defined as a range of processes where the South Western Sydney Area Health Service formally seeks the views, opinions and input of the community about health issues and its services and programs.

Consultation processes are generally one-off or short term, often organised around a specific topic or issue and designed to gain feedback and views.

What To Consult On

Any action or proposal by the South Western Sydney Area Health Service that may affect an identifiable group in the community is a suitable issue for consultation. The group may comprise those affected by a particular health issue, or it may be a community in a geographical area, or a community of a particular culture.

As a minimum, consultation will occur as part of:

1. The planning of health services
2. Assessing the community's needs for health services and identifying gaps in service provision
3. Identifying priorities, proposals and projects for a new service or for a change or relocation of a service, or closure of a service
4. Identifying issues of access to services
5. Gaining feedback to enable the evaluation and improvement of health services
6. Matters which have an impact on the community and the health service.

As better practice, consultation should occur as part of:

1. The development of policy for South Western Sydney Area Health Services
2. Identifying priorities for funding health services in South Western Sydney.

Principles For Consultation

Observance of the following principles will help ensure effective consultation.

- SWSAHS is committed to consulting the community on issues affecting the provision of health services in South Western Sydney;
- The community is a legitimate partner in decisions affecting the provision of health care;
- SWSAHS will be fair and consistent with all members of the community;
- Consultation will involve all interested people, even the organisation's critics;
- Consultation will occur as early as possible in the decision-making process;

- Consultation processes will be visible and readily accessible to the community;
- Consultation communication will be clear and simple and written in language that people can understand and information may need to be translated
- Communication will be honest and respond to and acknowledge the views of the community in a fair and respectful manner
- SWSAHS will listen to the views of the community
- SWSAHS will clearly communicate the actions it will undertake and then will undertake those actions
- SWSAHS will report back to the community following consultation processes
- Opportunities for community participation in health and for further community involvement will be identified through the consultation process
- SWSAHS will provide a range of consultation processes. These processes will be developed with the needs of the community in mind.

When To Consult

The community will be consulted as early as possible. Consultation usually occurs once the following have been defined:

- The aim and benefits of the consultation
- Who will be affected
- Who should be involved in the consultation
- The process of undertaking the consultation

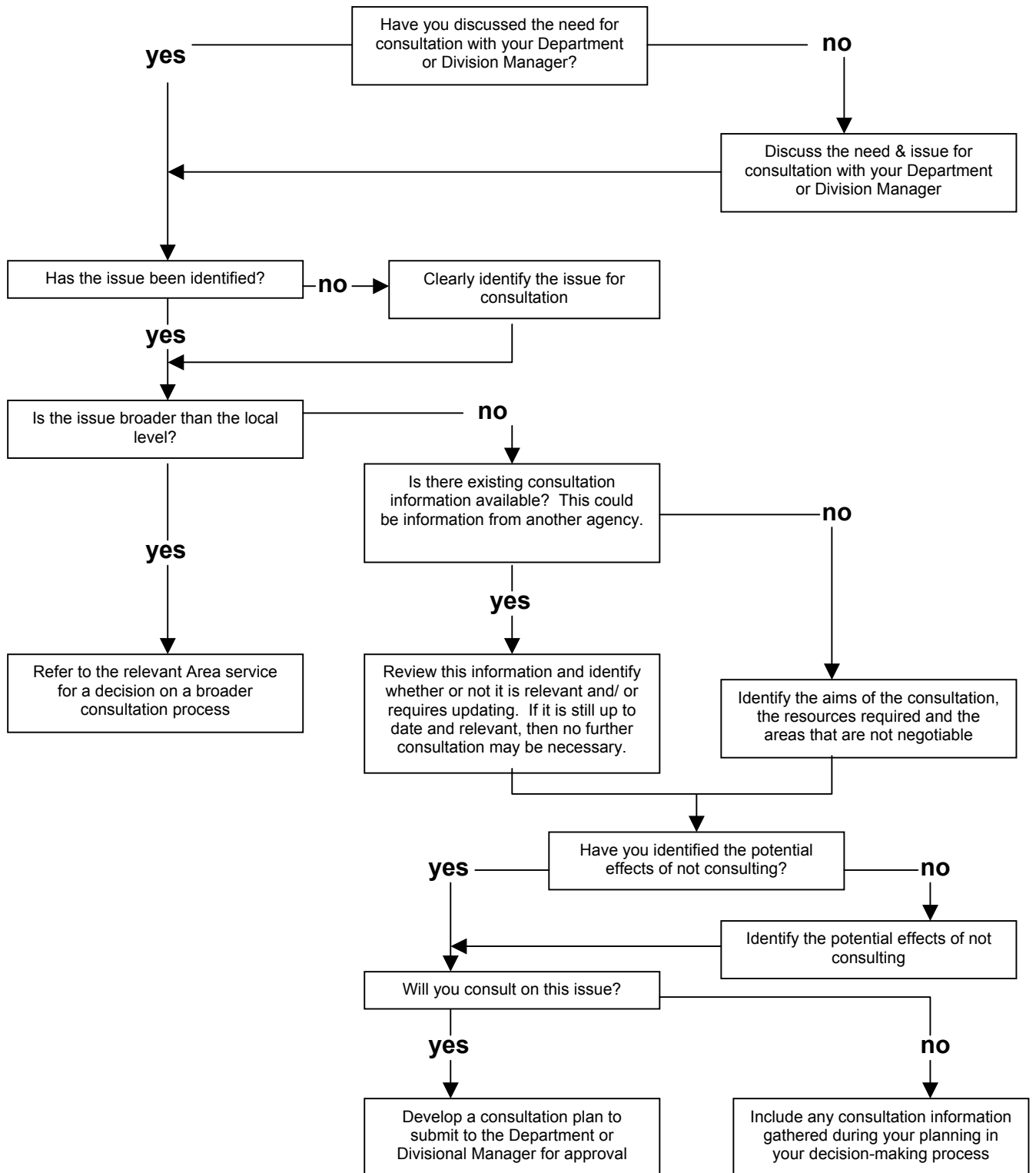
SWSAHS will work with communities to determine who will be involved in consultation and how consultation will proceed. It is important to consider the needs and preferences of affected groups in planning the consultation process.

The following questions may provide a checklist to help determine when to consult:

- Have you obtained approval from your Department or Division Manager to investigate consulting on the issue and to develop a consultation plan?
- Has the issue already been the subject of consultation in the Area or in your Sector (this could include consultations conducted by another agency)?
- Who has identified the issue?
- How politically sensitive is the issue?
- What are the aims of the consultation? What do you expect from the consultation?
- Do you have the time, resources and skills to consult effectively? If not, what are you going to do about it?
- What is the potential effect of not consulting?
- What matters are not negotiable, and how can these be justified?
- If the decision is made to consult, have you developed a consultation plan?
- Have you lodged your consultation plan with your Department/ Division Manager for approval?

The Sectors of SWSAHS need to initially decide whether or not they should consult on the issue and whether it is an issue that requires a broader consultation at an Area level. The following flowchart may provide some guidance in making these decisions.

When To Consult Decision Flowchart – local level



Who Is Consulted

It is important to identify those communities and individuals that will be affected by any proposal and/or decision. This will influence the techniques for consultation.

It should be recognised that there are individual consumers as well as communities that need to be consulted. Individuals bring their unique experience of using SWSAHS to the consultation process. Communities could include people and population groups of different languages and cultural backgrounds, different age groups, or those affected by mental illness, disability, isolation or lack of mobility.

South Western Sydney Area Health Service and its sectors should inform and involve the relevant community participation groups that have been established in consultations (for example, members of the SWSAHS Community Representatives Network and SWSAHS Disability Reference Group). These groups can offer guidance on planning the consultation and will be able to identify consumers and communities who should be consulted on the issue.

Approval and Endorsement of Consultation Proposals and Plans

It is recommended that consultation plans/ proposals are sent to relevant committees for endorsement or approval. Where appropriate, consultation plans/ proposals should also be forwarded to Sector Executive teams, the Area Executive team and/ or the SWSAHS Board.

Consultation proposals should include information regarding the following:

1. What is the issue/ subject of the consultation?
2. Which consumers or communities are affected by the issue, and how?
3. Who will be consulted and what methods will be used?
4. What are the aims of the consultation?
5. What are the details of similar consultations or details of recent consultations with the same group?

How to Consult

A consultation plan should be developed for each consultation process. The following outline could be used for developing this plan or as a checklist:

	CONSULTATION PLAN	CHECKLIST
	<i>Name of consultation:</i>	
1.	<i>Identification of issue or problem:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the nature and origin of the issue or problem? • What matters need to be discussed and decided? • What are the possible options and likely contentious issues? • Are there any genuinely non-negotiable issues?
2.	<i>Consultation participants:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify who is to be consulted or involved: whether whole populations in a geographical area, or consumers concerned with specific matters of health, or an age group, or communities of a particular culture, or those affected by a physical disability or a mental illness.(for example) • Is there a need for interagency consultation? • Do you need to involve the Manager or Coordinators of Community Participation? • Consider how participants are to be selected: through existing South Western Sydney participation processes; as representatives of groups or communities; by inviting expressions of interest; by a public forum; through advertising in the media.
3.	<i>Objectives of consultation: Objectives of the community's participation:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the aims of the consultation? • What information is to be sought from the consultation? • Why is the consultation taking place at this time? • Determine the appropriate level of community participation for this issue or problem (using the IAP2 spectrum - attached). • Develop the objectives for the community participation and the promise to the participants (using the IAP2 spectrum - attached). • Have the objectives and limits of the consultation been clearly conveyed to participants?
4.	<i>Identify the stages of the consultation process:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will participants be involved in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identifying the issue ○ Gathering information ○ Establishing how decisions will be made ○ Developing options ○ Evaluating options ○ Making the decision ○ All stages of the decision making process on the issue or problem • Determine the appropriate level of community participation for each stage of the consultation with a participation objective and commitment (promise)** (using IAP2 spectrum).

* The IAP2 Spectrum identifies a "Promise to the Public". SWSAHS chooses to use the term "commitment" rather than "promise".

	CONSULTATION PLAN	CHECKLIST
5.	<p><i>Consultation techniques: Strategies for effectiveness of consultation: Strategies to maximise participation:</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select the technique that meets the participation objective for each stage of the consultation. • Develop strategies to enhance consultation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Has the consultation been advertised widely enough in the community?; ○ Has the ethnic media been used?; ○ Are consultation personnel able to facilitate the processes?; ○ Do you need an independent facilitator?; ○ What processes will be followed in the event of conflict?; ○ Do the staff involved have the necessary skills and communication expertise for effective consultation? • Identify those participants who are hard to reach for whatever reason (language, disability, isolation etc); <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify where they are to be found and how they will be reached; ○ Plan the means by which they can participate. • Have interpreters been engaged for the consultation process? • Has information been translated? • Is childcare, elder care or are carers for people with disabilities required? • Are meeting times and locations suitable? • Are venues easily accessible by public transport and for people with mobility difficulties eg wheelchair access? • Can transport be arranged where required? • Is the lighting and seating arrangements suitable to the particular type of consultation? • Has adequate notice of meetings been provided? • Has participation been actively encouraged through personal contact? • Has support and advice been obtained from the Aboriginal Health Coordinator on protocols for consulting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities? • Has support and advice been obtained from Multicultural health workers who have expertise in working with multicultural communities?
6.	<p><i>Information provided to participants:</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the information needed by participants available and adequate and in such form that it can be understood? • Does an explanatory brief need to be developed? • How will the information reach participants in enough time so that they can absorb it and think about it? • What type of translations will be required?
7.	<p><i>Timetable for consultation:</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the time allowed for consultation, the number of consultations, the intervals to allow community representatives to consult. • Consider avoiding difficult periods in any year eg Christmas. • Is the timetable realistic? • What are the time constraints?

	CONSULTATION PLAN	CHECKLIST
8.	<i>Resources required:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify resources for the process and consumers' need for assistance to participate eg transport or childcare costs. • What resources and personnel are required? • Is there a need for staff training or external personnel? • Have funds been allocated to meet the costs of the process and the expenses of participants? • Have sufficient funds been allocated for visible advertising of the consultation eg quarter page adverts in newspapers?
9.	<i>Outcomes and feedback:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the anticipated outcomes clear? • How will the outcomes be documented? • How will the information gained be used? • How will decisions reached be implemented? • How will this information be fed back to participants and other interested parties?
10.	<i>Evaluation:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare for an evaluation of the process of consultation. • Has it been effective; has information been adequate, understood and timely; has debate been informed and managed; have participants received feedback on the outcomes of the consultation?

Following consultation it is recommended that a report addressing the following is sent to relevant committees, Executive teams or SWSAHS Board:

1. What was the feedback given at the consultations?
2. How many people were consulted?
3. What were the conclusions reached and how will these be incorporated into planning?
4. How will the results be fed back to the community?