



NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH
CONSUMER ALLIANCE

National Mental Health Consumer Alliance

Paid Participation Policy

August 2025



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Introduction

This paid participation policy is divided into two key sections. The first section (ethical considerations) addresses the National Mental Health Consumer Alliance (Alliance) position on paid participation. The second section (processes and procedures) outlines recruitment, how much consumers will be paid and other practical questions relating to paid participation in Alliance activities.

Our commitment to paid participation

There are a few core values that underlie the Alliance's position when it comes to paid participation. These include:

- Respect for the autonomy of consumers;
- The importance of engaging, and paying for, the consumer voice;
- A belief in the importance of consistency and fairness in matters of remuneration; and
- A strong commitment to defending the right of consumers to make decisions about the risks they wish to take (dignity of risk).

Service agreement

Whenever a mental health consumer is selected to participate in a paid opportunity with the Alliance there is an expectation and agreement by the participant to deliver a service for which we will provide compensation. The Alliance pays participants to contribute their individual lived experience perspective for the purposes of advocating for a better national mental health system. This is a fee for service arrangement which requires the participant to actively contribute their voice to the discussion either verbally and/or by using the chat function (if online).

Ethical considerations

Why we pay people to participate

It is the Alliance's position that paying consumers who are involved in our policy development and research processes is an important way to recognise the dignity and value of consumer experience and to promote inclusion. It is also an important way to ensure that a diversity of consumer views and experiences are foundational for national mental health policy and procedure development and evaluation.

We believe that it is fundamentally discriminatory to not respect the rights of mental health consumers to make their own autonomous decisions about whether they will or will not participate in any given project or activity. Allowing as much space as possible for dignity of risk is a core commitment in all Alliance's research and policy development activities.

In line with this position, while the Alliance does not, as a matter of principle, carry out a risk assessment of participants in its policy research and other activities, we do adopt a recovery oriented and trauma-informed approach in everything we do. We also provide opportunities for participants to provide feedback so that we can effectively learn as an organisation. Finally, the Alliance will ensure that support is available to all participants engaged in paid or unpaid activities on behalf of the Alliance within the scope of what is possible for a non-clinical consumer run organisation.

We also hope that in paying people to participate we do not discourage genuine engagement, or just pay people for their attendance, but rather that we provide some additional support to people who have views that it is important for the mental health system to hear. While we also recognise that some consumers live in financial hardship, the purpose of payment is to recognise the value of participants' participation, rather than as a tool to exploit these difficult circumstances and vulnerabilities.

Transparency and appropriate advertising

If the Alliance is promoting a paid opportunity, we will be clear as to the amount which will be paid when we invite expressions of interest.

When the Alliance invites consumers to submit an expression of interest for a paid participation opportunity, we will provide a contact person who is able to provide more clarity if it is required before deciding to participate. We will also provide at least two weeks for people to express interest in at any given opportunity.

We do not envisage that participation in any of Alliance's paid participation opportunities would have a negative impact on the person's future plans, although the contact person for any given project will be able to discuss any concerns if need be. While we will always do our best to be as transparent as possible, we also welcome any input that supports improvement of our advertising processes for paid participation opportunities.

Processes and procedures

Who is eligible to be a paid participant?

The definition of "paid participant"

A paid participant is someone that is invited to a paid participation opportunity and provided

with payment by the Alliance as compensation for actively participating in and contributing to policy development, research, or other activity or event that is facilitated by the Alliance or the participant is attending for the Alliance. We provide payment as recognition of the time, expertise, emotional investment, and contribution made by paid participants in advocating for and building a better national mental health system.

The Alliance will not provide payment if:

- 1) a person representing either an Alliance employee or contractor of another organisation attends an Alliance paid participation activity
- 2) employees or contractors of the Alliance participate in paid participation opportunities.

Type of paid participation activities

The Alliance pays people to participate in a variety of different kinds of activities. These can include

but are not limited to:

- committee membership
- expert Panels
- consumer advisory groups, steering groups (co-design, co-production)
- workshops, focus groups, and consultations
- interviews
- research and evaluation processes.

However, not all Alliance activities will be paid opportunities. For example, completing an Alliance survey. Whether an opportunity is a paid opportunity will be made clear when we invite people to participate. If it is a paid opportunity, we will be clear as to the amount which will be paid when we invite expressions of interest.

Communications platforms

Alliance events that involve paid participation can be held using various communications platforms. While most meetings and events will be held solely using video conferencing, at times there may be a mixture of face to face, teleconferencing, and video conferencing. Prior to advertising paid participation opportunities, we will clarify if the activities involved are either online, offline, or some combination of the two.

Eligibility and access

Do participants need to be a consumer of nationally publicly funded mental health services?

In general, yes. The Alliance requires participants to have a lived experience of mental health challenges AND to have used or tried to use and navigate mental health services and supports funded or partially funded by the Australian Government at some point in the last five years. Currently, these services and supports include:

- National Disability Insurance Scheme participant
- use of a Medicare Mental Health Centre (previously Head to Health Centre)
- receiving a Medicare Benefits Schedule rebate under the Better Access Initiative from using a general practitioner (to get a mental health plan), psychiatrist, prescribed medical practitioner, psychologist, social worker and/or occupational therapist
- Primary Health Network funded services, which differ region by region.

In some cases, we may need to target our recruitment. This means that we will provide more

specific requirements such as experiences of specific services or mental health challenges, a particular background or set of knowledge or skills.

Note that while we acknowledge that not everyone with lived experience of mental health challenges may have accessed, or tried to access and navigate, nationally funded mental health services, our primary role is to act as an advocacy body for consumers using, or trying to access and navigate, these services.

Recruitment

Recruitment for Alliance paid participation opportunities will be advertised using either one, or all, of the following ways:

- the mental health consumer peak bodies in each state and territory, where they exist
- the Alliance directly – the Alliance is currently in the process of developing a database for members who express interest in future opportunities to be contacted directly about paid participation opportunities
- direct recruitment through the national mental health consumer register – opportunities will be directly advertised to relevant people on the register.

Payment

Payment rates

The Alliance's current paid participation rate is consistent with the National Mental Health Commission (the Commission) which is guided by the current Remuneration Tribunal (Remuneration and Allowances of Part Time Office) Determination.

Participation payments will be calculated on an hourly pro-rata basis, minimum of two hours per meeting. Based on the current Remuneration Tribunal (Remuneration and Allowances of Part Time Office) Determination 1, the Alliance will pay a rate of \$476.00 for five (5) hours (which is equivalent to one day) for participants and \$631.00 for chairs. Note that you will be paid for attending a meeting, but not for preparation time for that meeting.

As per the Commission's paid participation policy, the maximum time for participation that is remunerated by the Alliance in one day is five (5) hours. The payment rates are outlined in the breakdown below:

Hours	Rate	
	Participant	Chair
1 hour	\$95.20	\$126.20
2 hours	\$190.40	\$252.40
3 hours	\$285.60	\$378.60
4 hours	\$380.80	\$504.80
5+ hours	\$476.00	\$631.00

For half an hour intervals, payments will be rounded up to the nearest hour. For example, if the event, meeting or activity is planned to run for 2.5 hours then it will be rounded to payment

equivalent to 3 hours of paid participation.

The Alliance will make every effort to pay participants in-line with these rates. However, paid participation will be dependent on availability of funding, the extent of participation requirements, whether the activity is identified as a learning opportunity as well as the duration of the event or activity. Details of the payment rate will always be included in the expression of interest for each paid participation opportunity.

The Alliance will not pay attendees who are representing an organisation in a paid capacity.

Attendees who are attending the Alliance's symposium will not be paid for their time, as the symposium is largely a learning opportunity for the attendees.

Payment rates are based on set timeframes as outlined in the expressions of interest and not dependent on actual runtime on the day. For instance, we will not underpay people if the meeting, workshop or activity happens to finish slightly earlier than planned and, likewise, we will not pay people more if the runtime goes slightly over the planned timeframe.

Finally, in most instances, payment rates are inclusive of pre-reading time and feedback post event. The Alliance will make it clear when preparation time is not included.

If any additional meetings are required, participants will be paid as per standard payment rates outlined above and based on the time duration set by the Alliance ahead of time as well as the availability of funds.

Participants

The Alliance receives input from people with lived experience of mental health challenges in two ways: through coordinated participation by the state and territory peak bodies and through coordinated participation by the Alliance.

Consumer advisory groups

Consumer advisory groups are specific opportunities where state and territory peak bodies coordinate a group of people with lived experience of mental health challenges to obtain feedback and direction on national policy, procedure, and other issues and projects. For these groups, the participant payment is based on the relevant state and territory peak bodies' participation payment or reimbursement policy.

Coordinated by the Alliance

If the Alliance is coordinating the event, participation payments will be based on the Alliance Paid Participation Policy.

If the Alliance is coordinating an event on behalf of an external organisation, such as a government department, the Alliance will try to ensure that the participation payment outlined in this policy is matched. If this is not possible, the participation payment may be lower than the payment outlined in this policy. This will always be clear in the advertisement for participation.

Frequency of payment

Paid participation activities could occur as one-off events, or as longer processes broken up into a few different activities. We will make clear in relation to specific projects whether they involve

participation in a one-off event, or in multiple events that are part of a larger process, such as sitting on a committee.

We will only pay participants after they have participated in an activity. We do not pay anyone participation fees prior to completion of the activities they have agreed to be part of.

Note that although we may ask if participants are able to attend a series of committee meetings when we invite expressions of interest, payment will be made after each meeting and not at the end of the project as a whole. While we hope that paid participants will be able to participate in the entire duration of the project, participants will still be paid for the meetings and activities they have attended even if they choose to withdraw before the project finishes.

Payment details

Consumers who agree to participate in a paid activity that is facilitated by Alliance will be requested to provide payment details so that the Alliance accounts team can facilitate an electronic payment after each time they participate in an event. An example of an invoice is provided as an appendix.

We have also included a statement by supplier form as an appendix. The statement by supplier form should be filled out when participants do not have an Australian Business Number (ABN). Participants will only need to fill the statement by supplier form out once for each project and/or committee they participate in with the Alliance.

Note that both these forms will be forwarded to participants in a fillable format by the Alliance and issues relating to this process should be directed to the Alliance contact person.

Conditions of payment

Payment details are valid, truthful and correct

It is the participant's responsibility to ensure the account details they supply the Alliance for payment are correct. The Alliance does not accept responsibility for any errors made by participants in providing this information nor for any processing issues that occur as a result of issues on the part of their supplier.

While we put every effort into ensuring participants are paid for their participation the onus rests on the participant to ensure they have provided all the necessary documentation requested and that the details in these documents are valid, truthful, and correct.

Minimum attendance requirements met

As mentioned previously, participants will only be paid for the activity that they attend. While we understand events come up that may be out of the participant's control, they will not be paid for activities that they do not attend. Participants are required to attend the whole paid participation meeting or event in order to be eligible for payment. This is to ensure that a satisfactory level of attendance is met.

Expectations of active contribution

Paid participants are expected to actively contribute to the discussion either verbally and/or via the chat function (if online) to be eligible for payment. Participants that do not actively contribute to the discussion may not be paid. Whether or not participants have made a

satisfactory level of contribution will be determined at the discretion of the facilitators.

Participants are to notify the facilitators ahead of the paid event or meeting if they require reasonable adjustment in order to effectively contribute to the discussion. If the requested reasonable adjustment is unreasonable or unable to be met by the Alliance then participants may be offered an alternative way to contribute to the project that may or may not include payment. This will need to be negotiated as part of a case-by-case basis with the facilitators or Alliance staff managing the paid opportunity.

Behaviour, etiquette and code of conduct requirements

Participants must be respectful and considerate of facilitators and other participants when engaging in meetings or events when representing the Alliance. This includes raising one's hand before speaking or clicking the raise hand icon (if online). Abuse and harassment directed towards facilitators, Alliance staff or other participants and blatant disruption of the meeting or event will not be tolerated and those who do so will be asked to leave or removed from the workshop. Participants who are removed or asked to leave by the facilitators for these reasons will not be paid for their participation.

Payment in kind

When participants are paid for participating the payment will only be made via an electronic transfer of funds to the participant's nominated bank account and not through any other in-kind payments such as a gift voucher, a pre-loaded credit card, or cash.

Reimbursement of out-of-pocket costs

The Alliance may cover accommodation, travel, and parking costs in some cases. If this is the case, it will be made clear in the expression of interest invitation which of these associated expenses will be covered. An example of this would be a workshop or event that is held in a different state or territory to where the participant usually lives requiring travel and accommodation if participant needs to stay overnight.

Processing of payments

Payments for a paid participation opportunity are usually processed within a month of receiving the invoice. Participants planning to send their invoice by Australia Post will need to inform the Alliance prior to doing so. If we are not working in our office, there may be a significant delay in payment if you use Australia Post. It is preferable that invoices are sent via email to the project contact person.

Note that payment for participation in Alliance activities should not be seen as a replacement of income but rather as a supplement. While we recognise some of our participants may be in financial hardship, the Alliance does not provide financial counselling or financial crisis support. Information on support for financial hardship and options for access to urgent help with money can be found on the Australian government's [Money Smart website](#).

Australian Taxation Office

Note that the Australian Taxation Office states receipts that are earned, expected, relied upon and have an element of periodicity, recurrence or regularity are treated as assessable income. If a person's activities are a pastime or hobby – rather than income producing – money and other

benefits received from those activities are not assessable income.

As all participants' financial circumstances are different, participants need to seek their own taxation advice, including how these payments might affect government financial support such as Job Seeker, Youth Allowance, and Disability Support Pension.

Version Control

Version	Publish date	Review Date
1.0	7 April 2025	7 April 2026
1.1	14 May 2025	7 April 2026