



# Service User Reference Group

## Terms of Reference

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## **1. Background**

Meridian is lead agency for a partnership of community organisations committed to building a more inclusive Canberra. Our partners are A Gender Agenda, Northside Community Service, and Sexual Health & Family Planning ACT.

As part of the Canberra Inclusive Partnership (the Partnership) agencies' commitment to inclusion, we are partnering with and learning from the unique insights of people with lived experience and recognise the value they bring to improving our work. We recognise that it is not just the work we do but the way in which we do it that contributes to a person's meaningful experience of inclusion.

The Service User Reference Group (the Group) aims to provide advice and input to the Partnership on the provision of services for the Supporting and Strengthening Canberra's LGBTIQ+ Communities Program funded by the ACT Government. Through establishing a body of representatives, our hope is that service users feel valued and have input into identifying service gaps, while also assisting in the design of services and contributing to the continual improvement of service provision.

## **2. Underpinning values**

The Partnership commits to upholding the following values in practice:

- We acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and live and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.
- Respect for the lived experience of LGBTIQ+ people, the intersections of their experience and the value of this experience as an evidence base.
- Diversity of voices and experience help us learn from each other. We value equity and inclusion and commit to providing opportunities for voices to be heard and acted upon.
- We value collaboration between funders, service providers and service users.
- We promote open, continual and transparent communication between the Canberra Inclusive Partnership and community members.

- We operate in a trauma informed manner, acknowledging that trauma is frequently a part of the lived experience of LGBTIQ+ and HIV+ community members. Trauma informed principles of safety, trust, choice, collaboration and empowerment underpin Meridian and Partnership agencies' engagement with communities.

### **3. Areas of responsibility**

The main areas of responsibility for the Partnership's Service User Reference Group are:

- Developing, carrying out and tracking progress towards the development of an annual Service User Reference Group work plan.
- Participating in and providing ideas and opinions into Partnership activities, including the Strategic Plan and Team Plans for partner agencies as required.
- Participating in training and induction activities with Partnership staff.
- Participating in advocacy activities, including presentations to government and community groups.
- Participating in developing feedback loops for ongoing communication between the Group and the Partnership.
- Participating in ongoing evaluation processes to reflect Group Members' experiences.
- Identify issues and areas of concern that the Group wishes the Partnership to look at, including service delivery and advocacy, both within the organisation and about wider concerns affecting LGBTIQ+ communities.
- Keep the Partnership listening to its service users who want to talk about improvement in the lives of LGBTIQ+ people and also the barriers inhibiting these changes.

### **4. Authority and decision-making ability**

The Service User Reference Group exists to support the Canberra Inclusive Partnership achieve its mission to improve the health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ people, their families, and communities by improving their access to inclusive, competent services that respond to their multiple and intersecting needs, experiences and priorities.

As an officially formed Canberra Inclusive Partnership group, it is bound by the lead agency's Meridian Delegations of Authority Policy, which sets out the chosen authority of all members of the

organisation. The role of the Group is to share opinions, ideas and advice on decisions. It is not an official decision-making group.

The Group will have support from the Partnership led by Meridian's Deputy Chief Executive Officer, who will promote the Group within the Partnership, making sure staff understand the benefits and opportunities for collaboration that the Group provides.

## **5. Leadership**

The Group will be chaired initially by Meridian to ensure the effective and efficient establishment and operation of the Group in accordance with its Terms of Reference. Minutes of Group meetings are to be taken by Meridian and distributed to Members and the Partnership, as soon as possible after meetings.

A Co-chair may be nominated by Group Members, after a six month establishment phase of the Group. This Co-chair will undertake an ongoing mentoring relationship with Meridian's Deputy Chief Executive Officer, supported by other members of the Partnership.

## **6. Membership**

The Service User Reference Group is made up of people who are part of the LGBTIQ+ and HIV+ community. Once formed, it will wherever possible, reflect the range of different service users the Partnership works with and the communities it is part of.

Anyone with a lived experience of being LGBTIQ+ and who is a member of the Canberra community will be considered for membership of the Group. This also includes individuals with limited reading and writing skills or problems with memory, language, thinking and judgment. It is the responsibility of the Partnership to ensure that their participation is accessible and meaningful.

### **6.1 Size of and eligibility for membership**

The Service User Reference Group is made up of up to 10 members. Membership is open to people who identify as LGBTIQ+. We acknowledge that as a term, LGBTIQ+ cannot capture the diversity of sexualities, bodies, identities, and experiences that exist in our communities. We use the plus sign to communicate that LGBTIQ+ does not capture the full diversity of sexualities, bodies, identities, and experiences, which include people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer, agender, non-binary, gender fluid, asexual, and pansexual.

In addition to people of diverse identities, the Service User Reference Group encourages membership from people whose intersectional lived experience can often result in additional discrimination, stigma and structural disadvantage. This includes but is not limited to LGBTIQ+ people: who are Aboriginal

and/or Torres Strait Islander; who are from diverse cultural backgrounds, including those who have lived experience of seeking asylum; who are people with disability; who use alcohol and other drugs; who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness; who are living with HIV or other chronic illnesses. Membership is also encouraged from people who are family or allies of LGBTIQ+ people.

## **6.2 Role of Meridian and partner agency staff**

The Group will include Meridian's Deputy Chief Executive Director, in a skill building role to support the forming and ongoing functioning of the group.

Initially, a staff member will be present and act as a co-minute-taker. Their role will include building the abilities of the Group Members to fully take over the task. The Members may request the participation of representatives from Partnership agencies when needed. A Partnership agency staff member will help to communicate outside the Group as required.

## **6.3 Service User Reference Group Membership**

Members of the Group are expected to commit to a two-year tenure as a Member of the Group. Membership positions will be declared vacant after each Member has served a two-year term and the selection process for that position will restart. Existing Members will be able to apply for a new term, but will not be guaranteed a position.

For exiting Group Members, an official certificate of recognition will be issued and requests for reference letters will be accepted by Meridian's Chief Executive Officer.

### **6.3.1 Ending Tenure – Resignation**

A Member of the Group may end their membership at any time by giving notice in writing to Meridian's Chief Executive Officer.

### **6.3.2 Ending Tenure – Termination**

The membership of Group Members may be ended if claims of misbehaviour or breaking of the [Meridian Code of Conduct](#) are found to be true through a process described in the [Meridian No Bullying Policy and Procedure](#) document.

The behavioural guidelines of the Group will include a process based on the [Meridian No Bullying Policy and Procedure](#) appropriate to the roles and membership of the Group.

## **6.4 Appointment process: Expressions of interest**

When appointing Members to the Group, the Partnership will seek expressions of interest via a range of different media platforms with support from Meridian's communications team. This will include

circulation through the Partnership's external and internal networks, social media, and the local media.

### **6.5 Appointment process: Service User Reference Group Co-chair**

Following a six month establishment phase of the Group, the Group may elect a Co-chair from amongst its Members. Nominations for the Co-chair position can be submitted to Meridian's Deputy Chief Executive Officer by Members and where there is more than one nomination Meridian's Deputy CEO and two Canberra Inclusive Partnership members will make the appointment decision.

### **6.6 Appointment process: Service User Reference Group Members**

Members will be chosen after the submission of an Expression of Interest to Meridian. Partnership members may be consulted in this recruitment process.

### **6.7 Member role outlines**

Each Member is provided with a detailed outline of their role.

### **6.8 Member reimbursement**

The Partnership will provide the following reimbursement to Members of the Group:

- General Members will receive \$75.00 per two hour meeting and a pro-rata rate for meetings longer than two hours. This is intended to cover costs such as parking, petrol, public transport and printing material.
- Reasonable additional expenses associated with attendance will be negotiated as needed.
- Members will also receive access to professional development opportunities, advocacy opportunities and access to three sessions of individual counselling per year.

For additional detail about resources available to Group Members, and procedures for claiming resources, please refer to the [Canberra Inclusive Partnership \(CIP\)'s Service User Reference Group \(SURG\) Resource Protocol](#) document.

### **6.9 Member renewal**

In the case of resigned or terminated Members, the Partnership will try to fill the vacant positions in a reasonable time. Consideration will be taken with selecting new Members for the Group to ensure there is mutual respect, understanding and harmony.

New Members will receive an induction to the Partnership and information on the Group's current status of projects, aims and conversations provided by Meridian and a Partnership member.

To assist new Members settle, a “buddy system” process will be used whereby the new Member is paired up with an existing Member for support.

## **7. Role of Service user Reference Group Leaders**

1. To act as facilitator of the Service User Reference Group.
2. To at all times make sure that the underpinning values, in particular, those involving equity and inclusion, are used in their guidance of the Group.
3. To welcome new Members and provide them with important operational documents such as the Terms of Reference, recent agenda and minutes, and a copy of the work plan and associated materials.
4. To make sure that an annual work plan is created through team work by the Group and that progress toward the achievement of the work plan is a regular agenda item at meetings.
5. To make sure that the annual work plan is shared within the Partnership and its aims, outcomes and measures of change are explained to the Partnership.
6. To call regular meetings at agreed time intervals and arrange for a suitable venue.
7. To provide an agenda no later than one week before each meeting, with opportunities to be involved with the agenda provided to all Members of the Group.
8. To make sure that a minute taker is chosen.
9. To chair meetings and make sure that:
  - a. an Acknowledgment of Country is made at the commencement of each meeting,
  - b. the agenda is covered in a timely manner,
  - c. all viewpoints are heard, and
  - d. actions and decisions are recorded accurately by the minute taker.
10. To make sure that the minutes of the meeting are emailed to all Members as soon as possible after the meeting.
11. To store meeting minutes, agendas and all other Group materials in the agreed manner in electronic folders and ensure that the Group continues to run smoothly.

## **8. Support to Members**

The Partnership will provide ongoing support to the Group. All Members have:

- clearly defined roles through written role outlines
- professional development opportunities
- opportunities for support and mentoring from Meridian staff and/or external staff as required and arranged
- access to three individual counselling sessions per calendar year
- defined reimbursement for official meetings and eligibility for appropriate additional reimbursement for associated costs (e.g. travel from outside of regional Canberra, substitute carers).



Partnership staff who are members of the Group are provided with support from their Manager and/or Coordinator to attend meetings and events as required and to manage their existing workload.

## **9. Communication**

The activities of the Group need to be communicated to the rest of the Partnership in a planned and ordered way. The Group will develop a variety of ways to do this, including through e-newsletters, emails, and word-of-mouth by Members and Meridian staff participants. Communication/feedback to the Group from the Partnership and service users is to be supported.

The Partnership will follow up on outcomes of work by the Group and share feedback with its Members.

## **10. Meeting frequency and length**

The Group will meet every two months, ideally for no longer than three hours. Meetings can take longer if agreed by Members.

The first meeting of each new two-yearly cycle will take place over a day and will focus on introductions, role expectations and the code of conduct. It will also include a training component focused on inclusivity, and an orientation to the lead agency, Meridian; including its mission, vision and services as well as an overview of the work of all Partnership members.