

Project Update ‘Our Agency’

The *Our Agency* project was launched on the 7 June 2022 and is being led by a partnership between VMIAC and SHARC - two leading lived experience organisations in mental health and addictions in Victoria. *Our Agency* is the working title of the new agency being established, which is recommendation 29 of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System (RCVMHS).

The new agency will be led by people with lived experience of mental illness or psychological distress to aid the development of other organisations, including services led by people with lived experience of mental illness or psychological distress. It will also deliver its own mental health and wellbeing services and create opportunities for networking and new partnerships across the community.

The *Our Agency* project team, made up of VMIAC and SHARC staff, and independent consultants, has been working in collaboration with the Lived Experience Branch at the Mental Health and Wellbeing Division in the Department of Health on the initial establishment phase of *Our Agency* which is finishing in December 2022. This phase of the project has 4 specific goals to achieve:

1. *Develop a constitution for Our Agency.* A constitution is a legally binding set of rules outlining how an organisation should operate. It details how the organisation will be structured and governed and its main activities. It also explains the roles, responsibilities and powers of the board, directors, management and members.
2. *Gather information* to inform the structure, role and function of *Our Agency* for the funding period from July 2023 – June 2027.
3. *Appointing an initial board.* Following the appointment of an initial board and an establishment phase, the constitution of *Our Agency* will enable new directors to be removed and replaced from the board, without government involvement. This will ensure it is independent and led and governed by people with lived experience of mental illness or psychological distress.
4. *Registering Our Agency as a legal entity*, giving the new non-government organisation legal status.

Consultation

There are a number of considerations and options involved in setting up *Our Agency* that will be best informed by exploratory conversations with consumers with different views, specific knowledge, and skills. The *Our Agency* project team will achieve this through an extended circle consultation (ECC) process that will involve conversations with selected individuals, agencies, and consumer groups with lived experience and/or specialist knowledge, ensuring perspectives and ideas of rural/regional, younger people, and people from diverse communities, are heard.

The ECC will focus on questions and issues about *Our Agency* that are related to identity, place in the system, entity structure, leadership and workforce - while leaving some room for ideas generation. However, parameters of the consultation will be limited to matters directly related to the formation of *Our Agency* as a funded legal Lived Experience (LE), consumer-led entity. The ECC will not substitute in any way, for the co-design and co-production efforts of *Our Agency*, that will be ongoing once it is established.

The ECC will allow the *Our Agency* project team to develop the constitution and make an informed contribution to the business case. Consultations are set to start on 8 September, to be completed by the end of September 2022. For more information please contact: Robin Litvins-Salter (VMIAC Communications Support Worker) via Robin.Litvins-Salter@vmiac.org.au.



Links:

For more information about the partnership organisations, please visit:

VMIAC: <https://www.vmiac.org.au>

SHARC: <https://www.sharc.org.au>

For more information about the Department of Health, please visit: <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health>

For information about the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, please visit:

<http://rcvmhs.archive.royalcommission.vic.gov.au>.