



# Workers Sharing Power

*Becoming an ally to those who are not very good at making it through the system is a great way of using what privilege you do have to help those who have less. You can use the power you have to bring other people along, to lessen bureaucracy, to make others feel welcome and included, fully.*

— Peggy McIntosh, associate director of the Wellesley Centers for Women, Harvard University.

## Understanding consumer perspectives

As a service provider, you can help consumers to navigate the system by:

- Acknowledging your position of power and privilege and trying to see the world from the perspective of consumers – see, for example:
  - [Mad Workplaces](#) for a perspective on mental health consumers; also [Consumer Man](#) and [In Our Own Words](#)
  - [Cultural profiles](#) to better understand the health beliefs, pre-migration experiences, communication preferences and other aspects of consumers' cultures.
  - [NICHEportal](#) for ideas on working respectfully with Aboriginal people.

- Developing an understanding of the social determinants of health and how some of these determinants might be influencing the health of consumers
- Listening closely to consumers' stories and what they are telling you.

## Working with consumers

- Recognise that what you are saying may not be easy to understand – and that does not mean a consumer is stupid
- Communicate with consumers in plain English, giving them 'health literate' written materials, and using different ways to convey information
- Encourage consumers to speak up if they have not understood something
- Encourage consumers to take notes, record what you say to them, or bring along a friend or relative to help them remember what has been said
- Use tools to explain healthcare options; then giving consumers the time and opportunity to make informed decisions about their care

- Consult with other providers involved in the care of a consumer and inviting the consumer and their families into discussions
- Respect consumers' confidentiality and privacy
- Respect consumers' decisions.

## Changing systems

- Work more broadly to make consumers' experiences of the health system easier and more empowering – for example, by:
  - ensuring that your organisation is working to become more health literate – see Checklist
  - putting processes in place for genuine consumer engagement, including actively participation in how your organisation operates
  - advocating on behalf of your consumers for better processes and support to help them navigate the health and community services' system
  - ensuring adequate consumer feedback and complaints mechanisms are in place
  - [consulting with consumers](#) and potential consumers and what they want from your services.