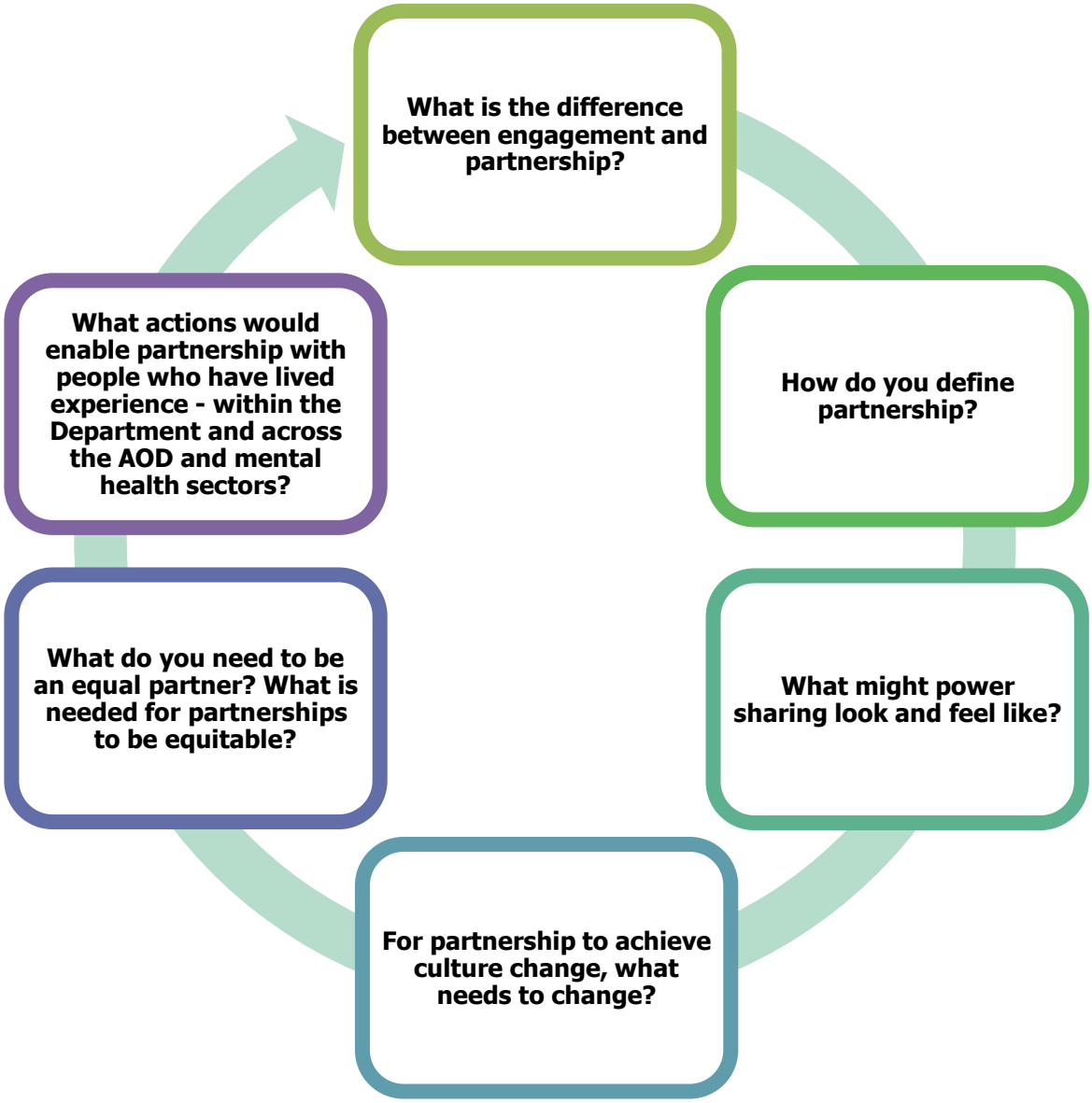
Moving from Engagement to Partnership Project

Community Conversation Starter (Quick Read version)



by inside out & associates australia

for

Mental Health and Wellbeing Division, Department of Health, Victoria
in partnership with VMIAC, Tandem Carers & SHARC

17 August 2022

EXPECTED BENEFITS OF THIS PROJECT

This project will provide clarity about the differences between engagement and partnership leading to a sector-wide owned and shared definition of partnership.

ABOUT THIS CONVERSATION STARTER

This conversation starter draws from our scan of the literature and aims to help people as they prepare to join one of the community conversations for this project. You can register for a community conversation here.

Email us at projects@insideoutconversations.com.au for a copy of the full-length Community Conversation Starter.

KEY QUESTIONS FOR THE COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

What's the difference between engagement and partnership?

What is engagement?

Understanding what is meant by engagement is tricky as it is often used interchangeably with the term 'participation'. Most definitions and approaches to engagement have an underlying theme of a more powerful group deciding whether, when and how to involve or engage a less powerful group. The more powerful group also decides what to do with the views and advice of the less powerful group.

What is partnership?

The partnership rung of Arnstein's civic participation ladder is described as:

> "[*at this level] … power is in fact redistributed through negotiation between citizens and powerholders. They agree to share planning and decision-making responsibilities through such structures as joint policy boards, planning committees and mechanisms for resolving impasses. After the ground rules have been established through some form of give-and-take, they are not subject to unilateral change*." (Arnstein, 1969)

A powerful example of partnership premised on redistribution of power and power sharing is enshrined in the Uluru Statement from the Heart (First Nations National Constitutional Convention, 2017). This is reflected in the Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration (National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Mental Health, 2015).

"If you're not getting a seat at the table, build your own table"

This quote challenges the assumption that marginalised people must adapt to the dominant system's way of working in order to earn a seat at decision-making tables (Richmond, 2016)

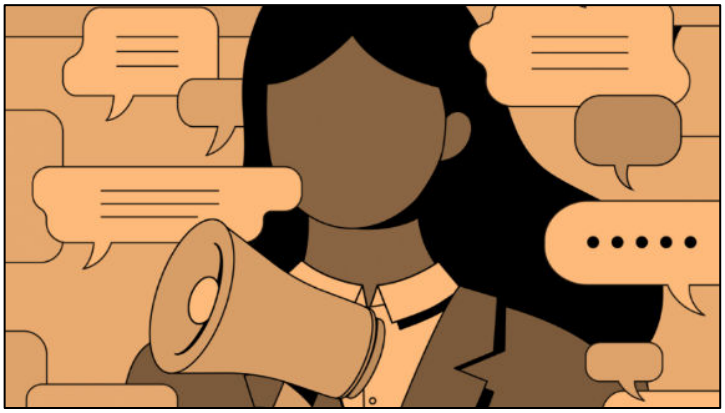


Image © Simo Liu https://hbr.org/2022/06/a-seat-at-the-table-is-not-enough

This could be translated to the current mental health and AOD context in Victoria as:

- Shared governance of the partnership
- The right to self-determination, autonomy and to keep one's own culture
- Respect for and sharing of world views, discourses and understanding the power of language
- Equity through the sharing and redistribution of resources to address power imbalances and any unequal footing
- Shared decision making and equal voice in the decision-making processes
- Negotiation through agreed means to resolve conflicting views with equal weight being given to the voices and views of each partner.

The Royal Commission determined that Victoria's mental health and wellbeing system would best be served if people with a lived experience of mental distress and their families, carers, and supporters sat equally, alongside the Department, as enduring and influential partners in decision-making and systemic change (Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, 2021). The Royal Commission is clearly indicating a shift from engagement to partnership.

How does partnership with people who have lived experience of AOD and/or mental distress or caring achieve power-sharing and culture change?

Partnership moves beyond traditional participation and engagement models and is built upon a platform of power sharing. It recognises that people with lived experience and communities are likely to have experienced "extreme power differentials" (Roper et al., 2018). Power-sharing seeks to remove these differentials and to address their adverse impacts on people's lives. Power-sharing involves those with power over others giving up that power.

Power sharing through partnership

To share power, people in structurally privileged and positions need to unlearn, sit with discomfort and act in solidarity with those in structurally marginalised positions (Daya et al., 2020; Gordon et al., 2021). A critical mass of people with a lived experience of AOD and/or mental distress mitigates iatrogenic harm and tokenism whilst effectively shifting power dynamics.

First Nations perspectives on power-sharing through partnership

To mitigate power differentials between non-Indigenous services and First Nations people requires unpacking dominant Eurocentric habits of thought and practice and relationship-building with community through mutual and reciprocal collaboration (Henderson & Navarro, 2020). The shift from engagement to partnership requires the Aboriginal community-controlled sector to have ownership of decision-making and for decolonising the power dynamic such that resources are equitably shared (Luke et al., 2020).

Migrant and refugee perspectives on power-sharing through partnership

In their response to the Royal Commission, the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria in partnership with Victorian Transcultural Mental Health envisage a rebuilt Victorian mental health system that is culturally safe, culturally responsive, equitable and inclusive (Plowman & Izzo, 2021). They highlight the structural violence of the dominant Eurocentric cultural location of the current system. Reimagining the system requires centring people from refugee & migrant backgrounds and building structural competency into the system.

LGBTIQ+ perspectives on power-sharing through partnership

The second national LGBTIQ+ mental health & suicide prevention strategy aims to embed an equity approach to governance, data availability, and resourcing which emphasises LGBTIQ+ community-led approaches (LGBTIQ+ Health Australia, 2021). This is supported by the Rainbow Tick accreditation framework which fosters LGBTIQ+ inclusive practice and cultural safety (Jones et al., 2020).

Youth perspectives on power-sharing through partnership

The Y-Change social and systemic change platform at Berry Street, states that:

> "Young people who have experienced disadvantage are the only people who can tell us what a policy looks and feels like when it comes to life. They are key knowledge holders in the search for 'what works' and the understanding of what doesn't, and they must be at discussion and decision-making tables, always." (Cataldo, 2019)

Partnership leads to power sharing when obstacles and barriers to equitable participation and voice are addressed. Through the sharing of power, partnership also provides a bridge to delegated power where people make decisions for themselves.

Partnership establishes a culture which embraces exploration and learning. It genuinely and equitably values the knowledge and expertise of people with lived experience of AOD and/or mental distress and their families, carers, and supporters. It creates a culture that recognises the quality of services and decisions are improved through the wisdom of the people who use them and whose lives they impact. Partnership fosters trauma-informed practice (Kezelman & Stavropoulos, 2020).

"Equality essentially means providing everyone with the same amount of resources regardless of whether everyone needs them…
Equity is when resources are shared based on what each person needs in order to adequately level the playing field." (Mlaba, 2021)

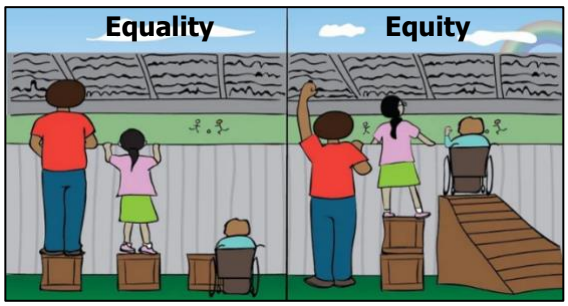


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WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DEPARTMENT AND SERVICES AND ORGANISATIONS ACROSS THE SECTOR?

Partnership in the AOD and mental health sectors is required across many levels including individually, at a service or program level, at an organisational level, at a systems level, and at a community and societal level.

This project is seeking ideas about how the Department achieves genuine partnership across all these levels. What needs to change – big or small? What practical recommendations could this project make – what solutions could it enact?

MORE INFORMATION

Details of the community conversations to be held in July 2022 can be found at this online schedule & registration site.

For further information, please email projects@insideoutconversations.com.au.