



tandem

representing Victorian
mental health carers

Membership Orientation Manual

Tandem Inc.

ABN: 27 726 220 810

Level 1/37 Mollison Street

Abbotsford VIC 3067

P: 03 8803 5555

F: 03 8803 5599

www.tandemcarers.org.au

admin@tandemcarers.org.au

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Purpose of this manual

The aim of this manual is to ensure that all Tandem members are aware of the role, objectives and purpose of Tandem, and understand what membership of Tandem entails. It is provided to all prospective and newly appointed members as well as to individuals invited to represent Tandem on external groups and forums. It is also provided to Tandem staff, volunteers and students.

About Tandem

Who we are

Tandem is the Victorian peak body for organizations and groups that support carers of people with a mental illness or emotional distress, and for individual carers. It is an Incorporated Association under the Victorian Government’s Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 (“the Act”). The Association operates under Tandem Inc. Rules of Association (“the Rules”) which are available on our website:

www.tandemcarers.org.au.

Our Values

- ❖ Respect
- ❖ Empowerment
- ❖ Diversity
- ❖ Equity
- ❖ Partnership
- ❖ Excellence
- ❖ Innovation
- ❖ Inclusion

The Purposes of the Association

The Rules state that the purposes of Tandem are to:

- ❖ be the peak Victorian not-for-profit body for carers of people with mental illness or emotional distress and organizations with a carer-support focus
- ❖ help raise community awareness about mental illness and the challenges faced by carers of

people with mental health issues

- ❖ provide information, education and training to Members and others involved in caring for people with mental health issues
- ❖ ensure state and federal governments recognise the role, contribution and needs of the carers of people with mental health issues
- ❖ facilitate communication between carers, government and stakeholders in the mental health system
- ❖ advocate for policy changes and improved services to address carer needs
- ❖ support carer participation in the planning, delivery and evaluation of services for people with mental health issues and their carers
- ❖ facilitate the development of relationships between carers and carer-focused organizations and other stakeholders in the mental health service system, and facilitate the establishment of partnerships between carers and service providers
- ❖ encourage research on best practice in carer support

We also:

- ❖ promote and advocate for carer involvement in the treatment and recovery of people who have experience with a mental illness or emotional distress
- ❖ facilitate communication and work in partnership with the Department of Health, clinical services, community service organizations, carer groups and networks, former carers, current carers, and other stakeholders undertaking evidence-based projects
- ❖ promote the value of carers' experience and carer involvement in co-design of service development and reform.
- ❖ support and advocate for diverse needs of all carers
- ❖ promote and support the development of the mental health carer workforce.
- ❖ publish E-news bulletins to keep mental health carers informed of:
 - our work at Tandem
 - latest policy developments
 - upcoming conferences
 - current research
- ❖ have a website that features:
 - Help Tips translated into several languages
 - up-to-date news
 - current projects and events
- ❖ bring carer-based perspectives to mental health conferences and meetings in Victoria and nationally, organising carer sessions and forums as appropriate.
- ❖ develop training material for mental health professionals from a carer perspective.
- ❖ administer the Carer Support Fund on behalf of Area Mental Health Services.

History

Tandem is the new name (in 2014) for a network of mental health carers which began in an informal way around 1994. Its focus was the organization of the first conference for Victorian carers of people with a mental illness, held in November 1995. Four main organizations were involved – Carers Victoria, the then Schizophrenia Fellowship (now Mental Illness Fellowship), SANE Australia and ARAFEMI (now part of MIND Australia). The Department of Human Services (DHS) was impressed by the force of numbers attending the first conference (400+) and concerned by the degree of hostility expressed to public mental health services. The Director of the Mental Health Branch and the Manager of Service Planning asked if they could have regular meetings with representatives of the four organizations to inform and be kept informed of carer issues.

More organizations and carer groups joined to form the Network for Carers of People with Mental Illness. This Network ran a further four State-wide conferences over the following decade. In 2000, there was a review of its role and structure. Formal terms of reference and strategic objectives were determined. This resulted in a widening of the membership of the Network to include different types of organizations and groups working with carers, as well as expanding the number of individual carer representatives, in order to ensure that carers' voices were heard. In line with agreed strategic directions and annual priorities, a number of working groups were established to enable the resources of members to be most effectively utilised.

By 2003, the Network's activities and aims had increased, and working group projects were proving difficult to sustain solely on the basis of members' voluntary time. With funding from DHS, the Network was able to employ a project officer and later to appoint an Executive Officer. At this stage, the Network was unincorporated and operated under the auspices by ARAFEMI Victoria. In 2008, the Network was incorporated under a new name, the Victorian Mental Health Carers Network (VMHCN), and obtained Charitable Institution and Deductible Gift Recipient status from the Australian Tax Office.

The staffing level has grown steadily and we now have the equivalent of 6 full time positions. This has enabled us to consult with carers and carer groups and networks across Victoria, to strengthen our contribution to policy development, to provide an auspice, training and administrative support to the Carer Consultant Network Victoria (CCNV) and to collaborate with VMIAC, the Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council (consumer peak body), to develop experience-based qualitative research and the mental health co-design process (MHECO). Working groups, supported by our staff, continue to be an important way of hearing carer voices as a contribution to policy development. Each working group has a convener who reports back to Tandem membership at monthly General Meetings.

Since August 2009, at the request of DHS, we have administered the Carer Support Fund on behalf of area mental health services, helping to provide financial support for carers of people receiving treatment in Victoria's clinical mental health services.

In 2014, VMHCN changed its name to Tandem and included individual carers in its membership for the first time. Tandem is largely funded by the Victorian government. The executive of Tandem meets with senior staff of the Mental Health, Wellbeing and Ageing Division of the Department of Health & Human Services on a quarterly basis.

For more detailed information about Tandem's history, see our website at www.tandemcarers.org.au

What we do

Policy Response

Tandem advocates for change and development of policy, service and systems in the mental health system to achieve better outcomes for individuals experiencing mental illness or emotional distress, their families and carers. To do this, we advocate for system-wide improvements to the mental health system at both a state and federal level. We work collaboratively with carers, carer groups and organizations across Victoria to achieve our aims.

Over the last several years we have lobbied on behalf of carers in a variety of policy decisions and directions. While we have managed to achieve better outcomes for families and carers, we are mindful that a lot still needs to be done.

We respond to social policy through providing:

- ❖ direct systemic advocacy
- ❖ regular meetings with Mental Health Wellbeing and Ageing Division of the Department of Health
- ❖ policy submissions and consultations
- ❖ carer representatives on Department of Health advisory, reference and working groups.

Research and evaluation

The Carer Research and Evaluation Unit (CREU) recognises the contribution and experience of families, friends and carers through research, evaluation and consultation. It embraces experience-based and other paradigms to develop evidence to improve the quality of the mental health system.

CREU aims to empower families and other carers to contribute meaningfully to service and policy development and to support their active participation in mental health research and quality improvement activities.

It was originally funded under the Consumer and Carer Experience of Care and Support Project (C&C Experience Project). The unit now undertakes a range of projects in collaboration with the Consumer Research and Evaluation Unit, based at the Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council the peak body for people in Victoria who have experience with mental illness or emotional distress.

The unit offers a variety of services in the area of research and consultation. Some examples include:

- ❖ MH ECO*
- ❖ Program evaluation
- ❖ Community based action research
- ❖ Policy advice
- ❖ Cross cultural concerns
- ❖ Carer consultation

- ❖ Organizational development
- ❖ Efficient service delivery
- ❖ Partnership building
- ❖ Policy review

**MH ECO stands for Mental Health Experience Co-Design which consists of a method of gathering information about the lived experiences of consumers and carers who have received a service from mental health services, and an innovative, cooperative approach to service improvement. MH ECO was developed by the research teams of Tandem and VMIAC. For more information go to the MHECO website: www.mheco.org.au*

Carer Support Fund

Tandem administers the Carer Support Fund for the Department of Health. Its aim is to meet the needs of carers by providing funding to assist carers in their role, promoting and sustaining the caring relationship, and improving the wellbeing of carers.

Training and Education

Tandem has developed training material which can be purchased or licensed, or Tandem can be contracted to deliver training to clients. Training modules are available in hard copy format and are currently being developed into online training material as well. Training includes:

- ❖ Families as Partners: training for mental health professionals and undergraduates
- ❖ Carer Consultant training
- ❖ Carers SkillsBank training: developed to increase the effectiveness of carer representatives
- ❖ Information for members, carers and others about the 2014 Mental Health Act and the reform of Community Mental Health Services

Tandem Publications

Please refer to our website for Tandem publications - these documents aim to contribute to the growing knowledge base of carers in mental health.

Membership

Who is eligible to be a member

As stated in the RULES OF ASSOCIATION of Tandem Incorporated (previously Victorian Mental Health Carers Network Incorporated) approved 23 January 2014: *“Any person who meets the membership requirements as set out in Clause 13 and 14 and supports the purposes of the Association is eligible for membership”*.

There are four categories of membership: Organizational, Individual, Associate and Life

- see details in next section.

Application for membership

To apply to become a Member of Tandem, an organization or individual carer must submit a written, signed application, stating that the person wishes to become a Member, supports the purposes of Tandem and agrees to comply with its Rules of Association.

Consideration of application

As soon as practicable after an application for membership is received, the Board must decide by resolution whether to accept or reject the application. The Board will then notify the applicant in writing of its decision.

New membership

If an application for membership is approved by the Board, this is recorded in the Board minutes and details of the new member are entered into the register of members. A new Member is entitled to exercise the rights of membership ten business days after he or she is accepted as a Member of the Association.

Annual subscription and joining fee

The Rules require Members to determine, at each annual general meeting, the amount of the annual subscription for the following financial year and the date for payment of the annual subscription. There is currently no annual subscription and no joining fee.

Membership categories and rights of members

Organizational & Group Membership

Organizational Membership may be granted to an association, company or other organization which, as determined by the Board, is a carer organization or has a significant carer focus. An Organization is required to appoint an individual as its representative and may change its representative by written notice to the Secretary. Although there is a limit of one representative at any given time, other organizational staff may join as Individual Members.

Group Membership may be granted to an unincorporated association or other collective of individuals which, as determined by the Board in its absolute discretion, consists principally of mental health carers. Such an association may be defined (by way of example only) by its geographical region and/or its objectives. Such a Group is required to appoint an individual as its representative and may change its representative from time to time by written notice to the Secretary. Although there is a limit of one representative at any given time, others may join as Individual Members;

Individual Membership

Individual Membership may be granted (by the Board in its absolute discretion) to an individual who is a carer for a person with mental ill-health and is a resident of Victoria.

Representative membership may be granted to any individual who, as determined (by the Board in its absolute discretion) can make a contribution to the purposes of the Association as a result of being representative of a category or type of carers or having experience with particular carer issues. A category or type of carers may be defined (by way of example only) by its geographical region and/or its focus on particular service types.

Associate Membership

Associate Membership is available to individuals who are interested in Tandem's work and support its purposes. Tandem provides relevant information to Associate Members. They may attend general meetings but may not vote.

Life Membership

Life Membership may be granted by the Board to an individual who has made an exceptional contribution to the activities of the Association. No application is required for Life Membership. They may attend general meetings and vote.

All applications for membership are considered by the Board of Tandem at the next scheduled Board meeting after the application is received.

Voting Rights

All members except Associate Members have the right to:

- ❖ Receive notice of general meetings and of proposed special resolutions in the manner and time prescribed by the Rules of Association;
- ❖ Submit items of business for consideration at a general meeting;
- ❖ Attend and be heard at general meetings;
- ❖ Vote at a general meeting;
- ❖ Have access to the minutes of general meetings;
- ❖ Inspect the register of members.

The rights of a Member are not transferable and end when membership ceases.

Ceasing membership

The membership of a person or organization ceases on resignation, expulsion or death. A member may resign by notice in writing. Also, according to the Rules of Association, a member is taken to have resigned if the Secretary has made a written request to the member to confirm that he or she wishes to remain a member and the member has not, within three months after receiving that request, confirmed in writing that he or she or the organization he or she represents wishes to remain a member.

Current Members

A list of current Organizational Members is on the Tandem website.

Member Engagement

Tandem engages its members and the wider carer community in all its work. To ensure that this happens there are a number of formal processes.

Tandem Meetings

Tandem members meet regularly to discuss policy and sector updates, share information, provide input and discussion on policy directions and issues, and other actions as required. All Tandem members are invited to attend and actively participate in these monthly meetings.

Working Groups

Tandem has a number of working and advisory groups to address specific needs or policy areas of concern to members. Usually formed at the start of each year, these groups act as a subset to the Tandem meetings and report back directly to Tandem members or to the Board. These groups can act in an advisory capacity to Tandem or may undertake work on behalf of the Tandem. Each group will have a Terms of Reference document.

Policy development and advocacy

Tandem as part of its advocacy work develops responses to government policy and directions. Tandem members are routinely consulted and encouraged to participate in the development of these policy submissions.

Representation on External Committees

In addition to the working groups, various members of Tandem represent it on other committees, references groups and policy development groups. Representatives prepare written reports after each meeting they attend and present their reports to Tandem meetings.

The Tandem is currently represented on the following committees and groups:

- ❖ Victorian Dual Diagnosis Initiative reference group
- ❖ Families of Parents with a Mental Illness[FAPM] State wide Advisory Group
- ❖ Gippsland Dual Diagnosis Initiative.
- ❖ Gippsland Alliance
- ❖ Carer Consultant Network Victoria (CCNV)
- ❖ Mental Health Tribunal Advisory Group
- ❖ VICSERV policy advisory group
- ❖ VICSERV peer workforce working group
- ❖ VICSERV CERT IV in Peer Work Development Group
- ❖ Department of Health Workforce Development Policy Advisory Group
- ❖ State wide Education and Training Group

- ❖ Australian Borderline Personality Disorder Foundation working group
- ❖ National Experience Tool Expert Reference Advisory Group
- ❖ Victoria Police Mental Health Portfolio Reference Group
- ❖ Mental Health & AOD Workforce Capability Framework Project
- ❖ Pulsar LEAP Advisory Group
- ❖ NorthWest Mental Health Community Partnership Group
- ❖ NorthWest Mental Health Family Work Group
- ❖ MHCSS Performance Management Framework Advisory Group
- ❖ Senior Leaders' Group MHCSS
- ❖ MHCSS Intake and Assessment Providers Meeting
- ❖ DHHS Reference Group for the NDIS
- ❖ Supported Decision-making Project Advisory Group
- ❖ Self-management & Recovery Technology (SMART) Advisory Board
- ❖ Evaluation of the Variance Reporting Pilot undertaken by the Office Chief Psychiatrist

Governance of Tandem

Powers of the Board

The business of Tandem must be managed by or under the direction of a Board. The Board may exercise all the powers of the Association except those powers that the Rules or the Act require to be exercised by general meetings of the Members of the Association.

The Board may:

- ❖ Establish subcommittees consisting of members with terms of reference it considers appropriate
- ❖ Delegate powers and functions to a Board Member, a subcommittee or Executive Director, with some exceptions specified by the Rules and the Act.

Composition of Board and Duties of Board Members

The Board consists of Chair, Deputy Chair, Board Secretary, Treasurer; and Ordinary Members elected at the Annual General Meeting. Board members hold these positions until the following AGM.

Board Members are required to become familiar with the Rules of Association and with the Incorporated Associations Act 2012. The Board is collectively responsible for ensuring that Tandem complies with the Act and that individual Board Members comply with these Rules. The Rules and the Act require Board Members to exercise their powers and discharge their duties with reasonable care and diligence, in good faith in the interests of Tandem and “for a proper purpose”. Board Members and former Board Members must not make improper use of their position; or of information acquired by virtue of holding their position, so as to gain an advantage for themselves or any other person or to cause detriment to Tandem.

A Board Member who has a material personal interest in a matter being considered at a Board meeting must disclose the nature and extent of that interest to the Board, must not be present while the matter is being considered at the meeting, and must not vote on the matter.

Under the Act, Tandem is also required to appoint a Secretary, responsible for maintaining the register of members and for interface with the Registrar of Associations. The Secretary is not required to be a Board Member, and can be any person which the Board in its absolute discretion chooses to appoint. The Executive Director fills this role.

Election of Board Members and Tenure of Office

The Chairperson of the Annual General Meeting must declare all positions on the Board vacant and hold elections for those positions. At the AGM, members decide by resolution the number of ordinary members of the Board it wishes to hold office for the next year. A member is eligible to be elected or appointed as a Board Member if the member is 18 years or over and entitled to vote at a general meeting. An eligible member of the Association may nominate himself or herself, or may be nominated by another member.

A member who is nominated for a position and fails to be elected to that position may be nominated for any other position for which an election is yet to be held.

Tandem Volunteer Information & Policies

The Volunteer Handbook & relevant policies are located at the Tandem Reception Office and copies can be obtained electronically from admin@tandemcarers.org.au.

Recommended Reading and Websites

Recommended Reading

The following documents are available on the Tandem website listed under “Resources”

www.tandemcarers.org.au

Caring Together: An action plan for carer involvement in Victorian public mental health services. (2004). Victorian Government Department of Human Services.

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/carer/care-involve.pdf>

Because Mental Health Matters 2009 -2019 – Commonwealth of Australia

<http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/Because-Mental-Health-Matters--Victorian-Mental-Health-Reform-Strategy-2009--2019>

Fourth National Mental Health Plan 2009-2014. Commonwealth of Australia,

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/mental-pubs-f-plan09>

National Mental Health Standards 2010 – Commonwealth of Australia

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/mental-pubs-n-servst10>

Consumer and Carer Participation Policy – A Framework for the Mental Health Sector. (2004). National Consumer and Carer Forum of Australia.

<http://nmhccf.org.au/documents/ConsumerandCarerParticipationPolicy.pdf>

Recommended Websites

The Tandem website features our contact details, history, publications, working group reports and more.

www.tandemcarers.org.au

The Victorian Government Mental Health Services website includes the ‘Information for Families’ booklet in several languages.

www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/

The Mental Health Foundation of Australia (Victoria) is the oldest mental health association in Australia, founded in 1930.

www.mentalhealthvic.org.au

Mental Health Australia is an independent, national representative network of organizations and individuals committed to achieving quality mental health for everyone in Australia.

www.mhaustralia.org

VICSERV is the peak body for Victorian community mental health services. It provides a range of services to its members, including sector co-ordination, support and advocacy, training and professional development, policy and information services.

www.vicserv.org.au

Beyond Blue is the national initiative working to address issues associated with depression, anxiety and related substance misuse disorders in Australia. In the past, Beyond Blue has been a research partner of VMHCN, now Tandem Inc.

www.beyondblue.org.au

The Kit: a guide to advocacy for consumers of mental health services and family carers.

[www.mhca.com.au/public.communitydevelopment/foreword.htm](http://www.mhca.com.au/public/communitydevelopment/foreword.htm)

The Private Mental Health Alliance advocates for improved private mental health services and seeks responsiveness and accountability in the private sector to those people and their families affected by a mental illness.

<http://www.pmha.com.au/>