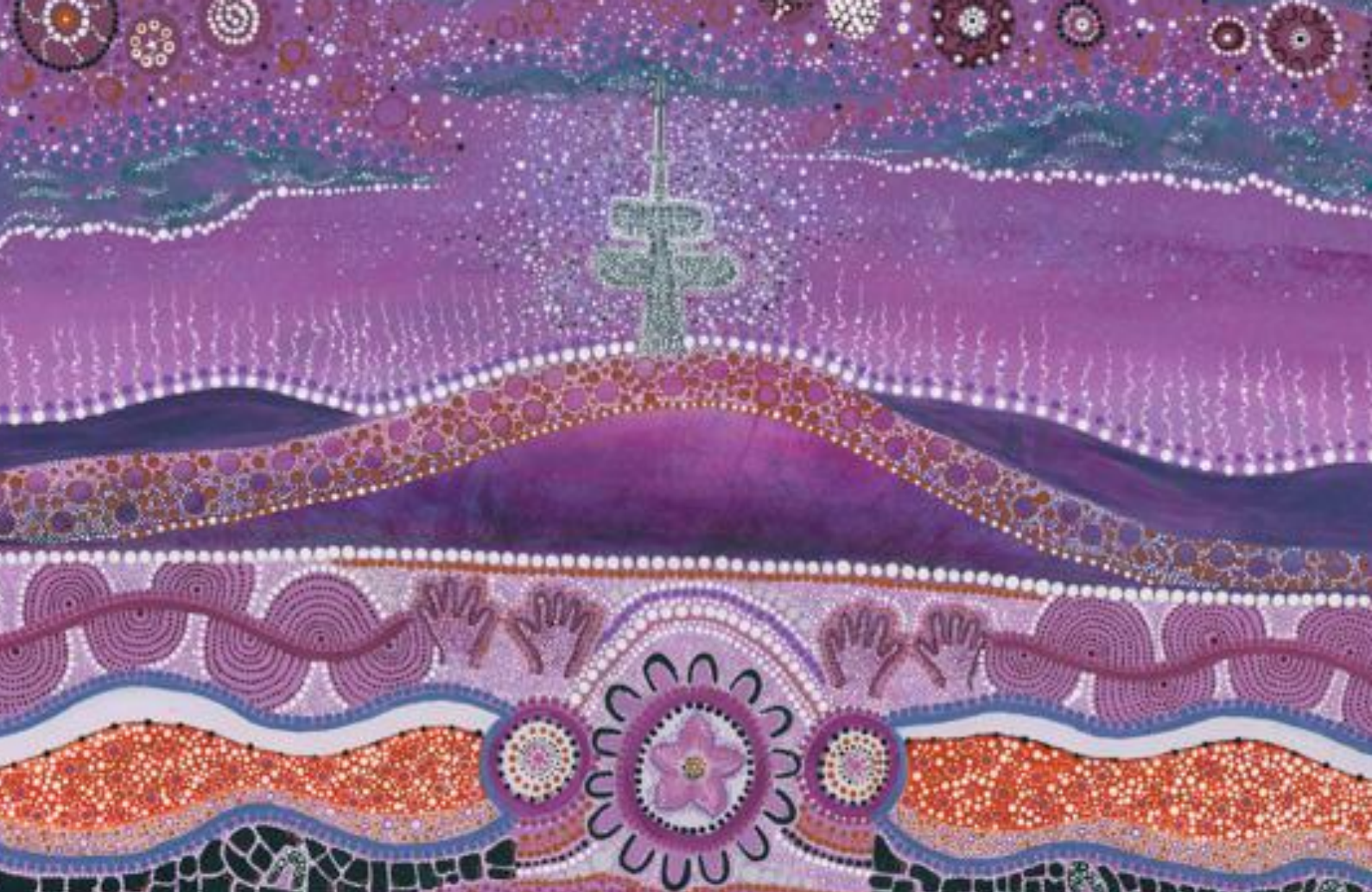




Service User Engagement Handbook

Contents

Acknowledgement of Country.....	3
Welcome	4
About Woden Community Service	5
Our Values, Vision & Purpose.....	6
Our Programs.....	7
Overview of Service User Engagement.....	8
Engaging with service users.....	8
Statement of Commitment	8
Our principles for service user engagement are:	9
Elements of Service User Engagement	10
How to get involved	13
Supporting and Working with Service Users	15
How are you reimbursed?	16
How are you supported?	16
Group Agreement, Terms of Reference and Work Plans	17
Resources.....	18
Privacy and Confidentiality	18
WCS Diversity Statement January 2024	19
WCS Culture Statement May 2024.....	19
WCS Staff Code of Conduct:.....	19



Acknowledgement of Country

Woden Community Service recognises the Ngunnawal people as the traditional custodians of the ACT and surrounding region and acknowledges that other people and families also have a traditional connection to the lands of the ACT and region.

We pay our respects to their cultures, ancestors and Elders past and present.



Welcome

Chief Executive Officer, Dan English

I'm committed to ensuring Woden Community Service (WCS) truly listens to and engages with you, our service users, and the people who support you.

Your voice matters in how we design, deliver, improve, and evaluate our service offering. I value your contribution, and so does our team and the community we serve together.

I've put together this Introduction to Service User Engagement to encourage and support you in becoming part of our engagement process. You'll find information about WCS, how we work with service users, and resources that might be helpful along the way.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to us at engage@wcs.org.au if you have any questions or want to learn more.

I genuinely hope your involvement with us will be enjoyable, satisfying, and fulfilling. I'm looking forward to working alongside you.

Dan English
CEO

About Woden Community Service

Woden Community Service began in the late 1960s, born out of a simple but powerful need: connection.

Maisie Griffiths was a young mother in Canberra's outlying suburbs. A newcomer to the region, she found herself surrounded by sheep paddocks and strangers in Lyons and Chifley. But Maisie wasn't content to stay isolated. She reached out and started building the community she wanted to see.

By 1969, Maisie and a group of like-minded locals founded Woden Community Service, turning their homes into an early hub for support. They offered counselling, babysitting help, and welcoming spaces for social connection. Maisie even ran a "Nearly New" clothing store out of Torrens Community Hall, which became a meeting point where mothers and families could connect.



The spirit of those early days remains at the heart of WCS today. We're a community service organisation that encompasses aged care, youth and family services, children's services, mental health, and more.

Our programs are funded by the ACT Government and the Commonwealth Government, and through the generosity of the community we serve.

Maisie Griffiths. Photo: Region Media

Our Values, Vision & Purpose

WCS's vision, purpose, and values explain why we exist and guide how we focus and behave as a service provider and employer.

Our Vision

A caring community where everyone belongs

Our Purpose

Building connected communities and enriching people's lives.

Our Values

Our values are Inclusion, Compassion, Hope, Responsiveness, Integrity and Social justice.

Inclusion

We respect and celebrate diversity in all its forms. Everyone is included as a valued community member.

Compassion

We collaborate to create caring communities. We offer kindness and understanding to those in need.

Hope

We are optimistic about the potential for positive change. We inspire confidence in a better future.

Social Justice

We work to increase access and opportunity for all. We advocate for those facing disadvantages or discrimination.

Integrity

We are honest, professional, and accountable in all we do. Integrity guides every relationship and action.

Responsiveness

We adapt to meet the changing needs of the community. We are courageous in how we grow and develop as an organisation.

Our Programs



- Community Centres
- Out of School Hours Care
- Early Learning Centre
- School Canteens
- Aged Care Social Groups
- Mental Health Outreach
- WCS Office

Overview of Service User Engagement

Engaging with service users

Woden Community Service (WCS) recognises service users and their support persons have the right to partner safely and meaningfully with WCS in the design, delivery and evaluation of services that directly impact their lives.

We are seeking expressions of interest from current and recent service users (within 12 months) of WCS Early Service & Legal Information

Statement of Commitment

Our commitment to Service User Engagement

We are committed to listening to service users and their support persons, and to engaging them in the design, delivery, and continuous improvement of our services. As part of that commitment, we:

- Recognise that everyone has a right to participate in decisions that directly affect them.
- See people who access its services as active partners in its work.
- Provide safe and accessible opportunities for diverse service users to have a voice and make informed decisions.
- Value the vital role of family members, kin, friends, carers, and other significant people in supporting service users.

We recognise that the experiences of people engaging with its services are the most important source of information about service quality and safety. Participation by service users and their support persons should lead to services tailored to individual needs, preferences, cultures, and values, resulting in better outcomes and the prevention of avoidable harm.

We operate transparently, keeping service users and their support persons informed about the outcomes of engagement activities. It also informs the broader Canberra community about its work, including opportunities for service user participation.

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original custodians of Australia's lands and waters, and recognise the diversity of their experiences, cultures, histories, languages, and values.

Our principles for service user engagement are:

1. Embed service user engagement across the organisation.
2. Develop safe shared spaces to engage with service users and their support persons.
3. Act on the learnings from engagement.
4. Seek to improve engagement activities through evaluation and research

Elements to create safe shared spaces for engagement

Commitment

Our executive team and board lead and champion our commitment to engagement, ensuring accountability and strong governance.

Collaborative Service Design

We design and evaluate services in partnership with service users, drawing on their experiences and contemporary research insights.

Culture of Action

Our culture, practices, and language empower staff to act on our daily engagement commitment.

Honouring Voices & Experiences

We value our service users' voices and diverse experiences, recognising their strengths and perspectives.

Transparent & Accessible

We engage openly and accessibly, reimbursing service users and their supporters who contribute to our engagement initiatives.

Supportive & Inclusive Engagement

We respect everyone's rights and choices, offering strength-based, trauma-informed, and culturally aware approaches to support engagement.

Elements of Service User Engagement

Foundations of Service User Engagement

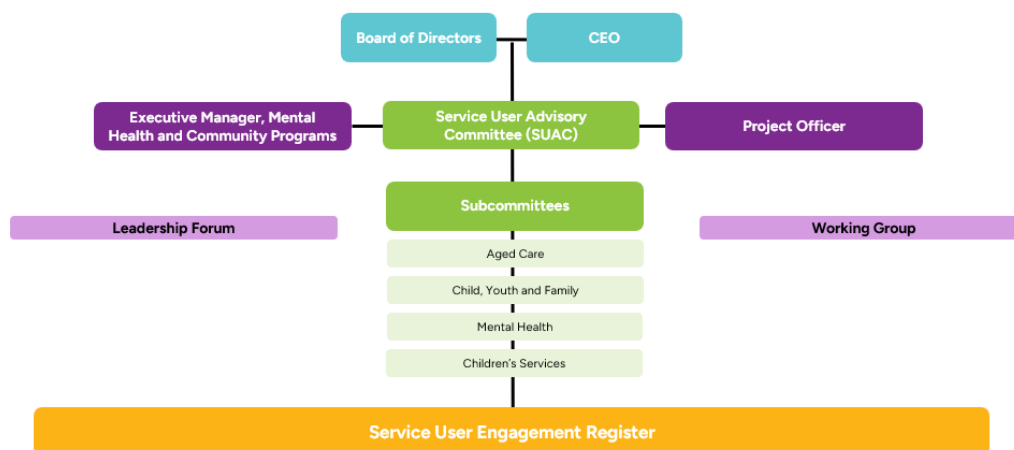
Service user engagement encompasses a wide range of activities in which service users and their support persons are involved, as well as organisational partnerships with service users and their support persons to design, deliver, improve, and evaluate WCS services.

It covers partnerships between service users and staff when care is provided at an individual level, as well as partnerships with service users and their support persons at a service system level. Service users and support persons are foundational to service user engagement. WCS uses the term service user to refer to all those who access WCS services. Individual services may use terms specific to their context, for example, children, young people, families, participants, or tenants. WCS respects any requests from service users to use an alternative term that is meaningful to them.

WCS uses the term support person to refer to someone who provides support to a service user and may be a carer, parent, guardian, friend, family member, kin, or otherwise connected to the person. We acknowledge that service users can determine who they consider a support person. We recognise the unique lived experiences and the valuable role support persons play in providing ongoing support.

Service User Engagement structures

This structure shows how staff, service users, and their support persons participate in and guide service user engagement across the organisation.



**Register**

A list of service users who engage in specific projects, focus groups and surveys.

**Subcommittees**

Child Youth and Family, Aged Care, Children's Services and Mental Health Subcommittees.

**Service User Advisory Committee**

SUAC will consist of 10-12 service users representing the organisation's different service areas. Marketing and Communications Manager attends as Chair.

**Board and Leadership**

Active participation from the Board, CEO and the Executive team.

**Project Officer**

Responsible for coordinating all service user engagement activities under the guidance of the Executive team.

**Internal Engagement**

The leadership forum and the service user engagement working group are regularly invited, informed and encouraged to participate at every level.

Staff participate in service user engagement through the Service User Engagement Working Group, a cross-organisational group of staff champions who work with the Executive and Leadership Forum to guide WCS's commitment to meaningful engagement.

Service users and their support persons can engage through three mechanisms: the Service User Advisory Committee (SUAC), Service User Advisory Subcommittees, or the Register of Interested Service Users and Support Persons.

SUAC membership is open to current service users and carers. Members who cease to meet eligibility criteria may remain for one additional term to balance continuity

with the inclusion of new voices. Eligible members may serve multiple terms to support sustained lived-experience input.

The SUAC provides governance oversight for service user engagement, while Subcommittees and the Register support the practical embedding of service user engagement across the organisation.

Methods of Service User Engagement

As part of the SUAC, a Service User Advisory Subcommittee or Register of Interested Service Users and Support Persons can participate in service user engagement at WCS via three main ways:

1. **Formal, ongoing service user engagement** involves service users and their support persons participating in the WCS Service User Advisory Committee, WCS Service User Subcommittees, and the WCS Register of Interested Service Users and their Support Persons. Another method is
2. **Regular, formal service feedback**, that is, collecting feedback from all those who have recently used or are using our services through structured means such as surveys. Service user engagement, partnering with service users and their support persons, also includes
3. **Targeted engagement** activities, when WCS seeks to partner with the WCS Service User Advisory Committee, a WCS Service User Subcommittee, and/or WCS Register of Interested Service Users and their Support Persons to design, deliver, improve or evaluate a specific task. Service user engagement tasks may include developing a new program, conducting a major review of a current program, updating the strategic plan, developing a statement of commitment on a specific issue, conducting research, co-presenting at forums, and participating in staff recruitment short-listing or panel interview processes.

As well, you may be invited to participate, for example, in a group discussion, a survey, an interview, or by telling your story. We may also ask for your participation in evaluations to assess and revise organisational needs, so we can continue to design your service provision from your perspective. We hope to fill in the gaps in how WCS works and work together with you to provide good service.

There is also the option to provide ad hoc feedback or complaints when current or past service users and/or their support persons approach WCS with feedback, comments, or concerns, using the pathways WCS has provided and promoted.



How to get involved

Service user engagement enables service users and their support persons who access services to participate in and make decisions about how their service is run.

To be involved, we need you to send to the Service User Engagement Coordinator, or the WCS staff member you are working with, an expression of interest or indication you are interested, by providing:

- Your name
- Best contact details
- Service/s accessed through WCS
- Particular issues with WCS services
- Accessibility requirements (eg Can you complete online surveys?)

Or complete the online expression of interest form at l.wcs.org.au/sue-register or by scanning the QR code above.

Expressions of Interest for membership of the WCS Service User Advisory Committee, a WCS Service User Subcommittee, and/or WCS Register of Interested Service Users and Support Persons are strongly encouraged. Encouragement is also given to people who are from diverse backgrounds, ages and identities, including people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, culturally and linguistically diverse identities, LGBTIQ+ people, seniors, young people and people with lived experiences of disability, homelessness and/or mental health issues.

After receiving your expression of interest, the Service User Engagement Coordinator will contact you to ascertain your skills and interests, so that we can match you with tasks you know about. We can then figure out the best ways that WCS can work with and support you.

Service users and their support persons can participate concurrently in the Service User Advisory Committee or Service User Subcommittee (for Children's Services, Mental Health, Aged Care, and Youth), and the Register of Interested Service Users and their Support Persons.

Service users will be advised by WCS of the outcomes of their participation and the feedback they have provided.

WCS is committed to continuously improving our services through embedding the idea of partnership.

Ad hoc Feedback, Comments and Complaints

We value feedback, comments, and complaints you may have to help us improve our service. Ad hoc feedback, comments, and complaints can be registered and addressed through the feedback form at www.wcs.org.au/contact-us

Anyone who has feedback, comments, or complaints has the right to have the matter dealt with fairly and promptly, in a confidential manner, without fear of reprisal. Service users can involve a friend, an advocate or both for support if required. If you receive feedback, comments or complaints from other service users or their support persons, please contact the appropriate program manager.



Supporting and Working with Service Users



How are you reimbursed?

Service users and their support persons who are engaged with WCS in formal, ongoing codesign mechanisms are entitled to claim reimbursement payments for costs associated with their participation. This does not include service area regular feedback on services, for example, annual surveys assessing current services.

WCS offers reimbursement payments to service users who:

- are engaged in the **WCS Service User Advisory Committee** OR
- are engaged in a WCS Service area's formal, ongoing **Service User Subcommittee** OR
- have agreed to be on the **Register of Interested Service Users and their Support Persons** and are formally consulted by WCS in this capacity.

WCS provides practical assistance to address barriers to participation.

These service users or support persons will be invited to provide their payment details to WCS via a Service User Agreement and Personal Details Form, and an ATO Statement by a Supplier form. This normally occurs at the first formal meeting attended by service users and their support persons or given to the Register of Interested Service Users and their Support Persons members via email/post from your WCS Service User Engagement Champion. A Reimbursement Claim Form is to be completed at the end of each formal, ongoing engagement activity.

The reimbursement rate is based on Canberra Health Services Procedure for Consumer, Carer and Community Representative Reimbursement. Reimbursement payment rates are reviewed annually.

How are you supported?

If you require support in your role as a Service Use Advisory Committee member, Service User Subcommittee member, or Reference Group or Register of Interested Service Users and their Support Persons member, you are able to seek support from:

- the Service User Engagement Champion or Manager in the service area you are representing or engaged with.
- the Chair of the Service User Engagement Working Group.

We encourage you to send any feedback or questions you have about service user engagement to WCS to engage@wcs.org.au.

Group Agreement, Terms of Reference and Work Plans

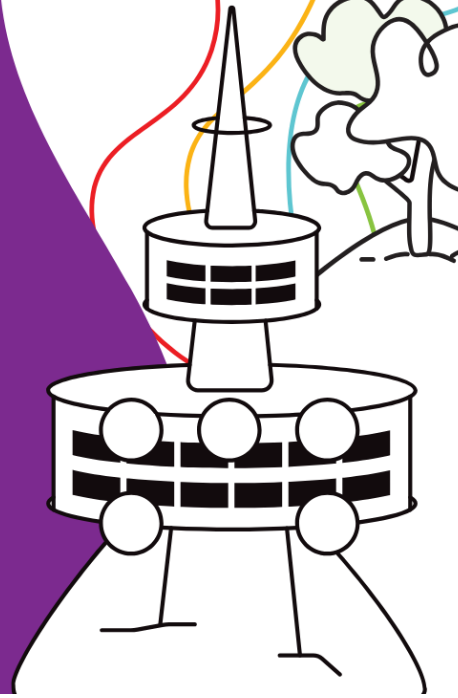
In the interests of creating and maintaining shared safe spaces for engagement and participation, initial group tasks for members of the Service User Advisory Committee and Service User Subcommittees normally include coming up with a list of 'rules' or expected behaviours that all participants agree to and that enable everyone to have their voices heard safely and respectfully. This is called a **Group Agreement** and is normally designed at the first meeting and then reviewed as needed. The Group Agreement is included in the Personal Details form, also used to include your personal details, and is based on the WCS Staff Code of Conduct (see appendix).

Group members will be asked to acknowledge that they have read, understood, and agreed to abide by this WCS Service User Engagement Group Agreement. Any breach of this agreement will be investigated by the WCS Service User Engagement Working Group Chairperson and may result in termination of membership of the relevant service user engagement mechanism.

Service User Engagement groups will agree to Terms of Reference (ToR) for the group, which will be reviewed annually. The ToR establishes the purpose of the group, how often the group will meet, and the expectations for both group members and WCS staff.

Annual **Work Plans** are to be developed by each group: the Service User Advisory Committee and the Service User Subcommittees. Work plans detail the activities the group and WCS agree to undertake each year, who will be responsible, timeframes, and the level of influence service users and support persons can expect for each activity. A Work Plan enables a group and WCS to monitor the progress of activities.

Resources



Privacy and Confidentiality

WCS collects personal information from you to enable you to engage with us. We collect and protect your personal information under the *Privacy Act 1988* and other relevant legislation. Without providing your personal information, you will not be able to participate in ongoing, formal engagement activities.

WCS ensures that personal information provided to us remains secure and is used only for the purposes for which it is collected. WCS will not share information without your consent, unless required by law or to prevent a serious threat to life, health or safety.

You can request to see the personal information we hold about you and ask for it to be corrected if you think it is not accurate. You can make a complaint if you think we have breached your privacy. To do this, you can raise this with any WCS staff member or contact the WCS Privacy and Complaints Officer (privacy@wcs.org.au).

Further information is available in our *WCS Privacy Policy* on our website or on request from your direct WCS staff contact.

WCS is an Accredited Organisation

WCS has met the accreditation requirements set by the Quality Improvement Council (QIC) for *Health and Community Service Standards (7.1.1)*.

WCS is accredited to the following service-area-specific standards:

- National Quality Standard for Children's Services
- Aged Care Quality Standards
- National Standards for Mental Health Services

WCS Diversity Statement January 2024

WCS embraces, supports and strengthens diversity within our community, our services, and our organisation. We acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the original custodians of the lands and waters of Australia. We recognise human diversity as an asset and a strength, and we actively challenge and respond to the systemic disadvantage many groups in our society face. We create a culture of respect and inclusivity within our organisation, where everyone feels valued and can contribute.

WCS Culture Statement May 2024

WCS believes that a diverse and inclusive workplace culture helps all staff feel valued and safe. We are committed to WCS's purpose and are adaptive and responsive to the needs of our community and colleagues. This commitment to a positive culture will help WCS service users receive safe and high-quality services.

We are committed to continuous improvement, being accountable for our decisions and actions and being transparent and timely with our communication across the organisation.

The WCS commitment to diversity and inclusion is set out in the *WCS Culture Statement, May 2024*

WCS Staff Code of Conduct:

- Behave honestly and with integrity
- Act with care and diligence
- Treat everyone with respect and courtesy, and without discrimination, bullying, intimidation or harassment
- Comply with all applicable Australian laws and WCS's policies, guidelines and procedures
- Comply with any lawful and reasonable direction given by someone in WCS who has the authority to give the direction
- Respect and maintain appropriate confidentiality and privacy of staff, service users and their support persons, and others who have relationships with WCS
- Disclose, and take reasonable steps to avoid, any conflict of interest (real or apparent) relating to your service user engagement activities or the interests of WCS
- Maintain appropriate behaviour on social media, and not refer to WCS in any manner that may damage its reputation
- Do not provide false or misleading information in any situation

- Do not make improper use of inside information, or of your duties, status, power or authority, to gain or seek to gain a personal benefit or advantage
- Always behave in a way that upholds WCS's vision, purpose, values and goals, integrity and good reputation
- Report suspected breaches of the Code of Conduct immediately, or as soon as possible.

Members will be asked to acknowledge that they have read, understood, and agreed to abide by this WCS Service User Engagement Agreement. Any breach of this agreement will be investigated by the WCS Service User Engagement Working Group Chairperson and may result in termination of membership of the relevant Service User Engagement mechanism.