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Making Every Voice Count

By Liza Lorenzetti (CAC Representative, Alberta)

The Consumer Advisory Council has developed a consensus decision-making protocol. This protocol helps us to document how decisions are made within the group and officially endorses a process that is inclusive and participatory. As people with arthritis and self-advocates, we believe that everyone's voice is important. By including every voice in a process of decision making, the Council has been able to build its organizational capacity and meet the goals outlined in our strategic plan.

What is consensus?

The Consumer Advisory Council adopted a consensus definition that is utilized by a group called ACT UP; this organization is a self-advocacy organization for people living with HIV/AIDS. According to this definition, "consensus is a method by which an entire group of people can come to an agreement. The input and ideas of all participants are gathered and synthesized to arrive at a final decision acceptable to all". In a consensus process, everyone has the right to be heard, regardless of who they are and what position they occupy in the group. Although a consensus process does not guarantee that everyone will necessarily agree on the final group decision, each member is given the opportunity to speak their mind, to be heard, and to propose creative alternatives.

Benefits of consensus

It creates community!

Through consensus, a group works together as a team to reach the best solution possible. A consensus process promotes openness, honesty, trust, respect, and a sense of community.

It is actually faster and more efficient!

Consensus is often dismissed as being a time-consuming process, but it is actually faster, more efficient, and more reliable than the traditional methods of decision-making. Consensus compels the group to 'out' their concerns and disagreements from the onset, instead of harbouring them or 'beating around the bush'. Although a meeting that uses the consensus method may be longer than one where a majority vote is utilized, the non-consensus formats often do not create group 'buy in' on decisions. This kind of commitment by the group is vital to the implementation and outcome. Also, if there are group members who were voted down or remained silent about their disagreement with the decision that was made, this will often reflect in either the compliance or the moral of these group members.

Find out more...

To find out more about the Consensus Guide or some of the other ways that CAN's Consumer Advisory Council is working to support a strong consumer voice for arthritis research, please contact us.

References

[Act Up: AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power. Consensus Decision Making](#) (accessed on 2003/04/03).